00081571

BOMBAY BRANCH
OF THE
Royal Asiatic Society.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018

THE

GREEK TRAGIC THEATRE:

CONTAINING

ÆSCHYLUS BY DR. POTTER,

SOPHOCLES BY DR. FRANCKLIN,

AND

EURIPIDES BY MICH. WODHULL, ESQ.

A NEW EDITION,

Revised and corrected throughout by the Translators

81571

WITH

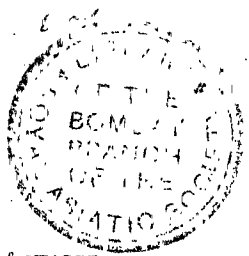
A DISSERTATION ON ANTIENT TRAGEDY,

BY THOMAS FRANCKLIN, D. D.

LATE GREEK PROFESSOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. I. CONTAINING ÆSCHYLUS.



LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JOHN WALKER; T. PAYNE; VERNOR, HOOD, & SHARPE; R. LEA; J. NUNN; CUTHELL & MARTIN; E. JEFFERY; LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME; LACKINGTON, ALLEN, & CO.; J. BOOKER; J. RICHARDSON; BLACK, PARRY, & KINGSBURY; J. FAULDER; J. ASPERNE; AND J. HARRIS.

1809.

00081571

PREFACE.

THE noble author, with whose remaining tragedies the public is here presented, was an Athenian of an honourable family, distinguished for the sublimity of his genius and the ardour of his martial spirit. In his youth he had read Homer with the warmest enthusiasm; and finding his great master unrivalled in the possession of the Epic, he early conceived the design of creating a new province for himself, and forming the drama; so much we may be allowed to infer from the fable, that whilst he was yet a boy Bacchus appeared to him as he lay asleep in a vineyard, and commanded him to write tragedies. This noble design he soon executed, and before the twenty-fifth year of his age began to entertain his countrymen with representations worthy of an Athenian audience. He had pursued these studies about ten years, when Darius invaded Greece. His generals, Datis and Artaphernes, with an army of two hundred thousand foot and tenthous and horse, were now advanced

to the plains of Marathon, distant only ten miles from Athens. The danger which threatened his country, called forth the martial spirit of our poet; and very honourable mention is made of him, and his two brothers, Cynægirus and Amynias, for their eminent valour in that battle: to have wanted courage on such an occasion would have been a mark of the most abject baseness; but to be distinguished in an action, where every soldier was a hero, is a proof of superior merit: in a picture representing the battle of Marathon the portrait of Æschylus was drawn: this was all the honour that Miltiades himself received from the state for his glorious conduct on that day; he was placed at the head of the ten commanders, and drawn in the act of encouraging the soldiers and beginning the battle.

Some time after, Cynægirus was one of the four naval commanders, who, with an armament of one thousand Grecians, defeated thirty thousand Persians; but he lost his life in the action.

Ten years after the battle of Marathon, when Xerxes made that immense preparation to revenge the defeat of his father, we find the two surviving brothers exerting their courage in the sea-fight of Salamis: here Amynias, too boldly laying hold of a Persian ship, had his hand lopped off with a sabre; but Æschylus defended him, and saved his life; and the Athenians decreed him the first ho-

nours, because he was the first to attack the commander of the Persian fleet, shattered the ship to pieces, and killed the satrap. It is observed that the two brothers were ever after inseparable. The following year Æschylus acquired fresh glory in the battle of Platæa, where the brave Persian Mardonius was defeated and slain.

Having taken this active part in three the most memorable battles that grace the annals of Greece, and distinguished himself as a good citizen and a brave man, he returned with ardour to his former studies, and completed his design of making the drama a regular, noble, and rational entertainment. He wrote about seventy tragedies, and was in great esteem with his countrymen: but upon some disgust in the latter part of his life he retired from Athens to the court of Hiero king of Sicily, where, about three years after, he died in the sixty-ninth year of his age. The cause of this disgust is variously related: some impute it to his impatience of the rising fame of Sophocles, yet a young man, to whom the prize was adjudged against him; others to the preference given to the Elegies of Simonides, written in honour of those who fell in the field of Marathon.

But to have excelled in elegy could have added no glory to the superior genius of Æschylus: neither does it appear probable that such a contest should have happened thirty years after the battle

was fought. From the other charge one would wish to vindicate so great a name; and happily it carries its own confutation with it; for whether Sophocles was only seven or seventeen years younger than Æschylus, which is not precisely determined, he could not be a young man when the other was sixty-four; and we know that the prize was adjudged to the last exhibition of Æschylus, which consisted of his Agamemnon, the Choephoræ, the Furies, and a satyric piece. But the tragedy of the Furies gave great offence to the city; and the poet, whether for that or on some other pretence, was accused of impiety. His brother Amynias pleaded his cause; the Athenians were struck with this instance of fraternal affection, they reverenced their maimed veteran, and Æschylus was acquitted. But such a spirit was not formed to submit to the affront; it made too deep an impression to be effaced; and the poet quitted the city with great indignation, declaring with a noble pride that he would intrust his tragedies to posterity, certain that he should receive from thence the honour he deserved. This honour the Athenians soon paid to his noble works: by a decree of the senate, never granted to any other, they offered rewards to any man that should again exhibit his plays; they frequently adjudged the prize to him after his decease, and acknowledged him "the Father of Tragedy."

To comprehend the justness of this honourable appellation, and to form a precise idea of the originality of Æschylus, it will be necessary to trace the Tragic Muse from her birth to her yet infirm state when this poet gave her strength, spirit, and dignity. The story has been told, it seems, twenty times already; let it not give offence if it be told once more: it shall be a short tale. Tragedy then was at first no more than a rustic song in honour of Bacchus, attending the sacrifice of a goat, an animal hated by the god, because its bite is particularly hurtful to the vine. What was originally no more than an accidental frolic, became an annual custom, next a public sacrifice, and thence an established rite; for as every thing in pagan antiquity was sacred, sports and amusements were changed into feasts, and the temples were converted into theatres: but this by due degrees. The Grecians, advancing in polished manners, carried into their towns a feast that sprung from the leisure of the country: their best poets took a pride in composing these religious hymns to the honour of Bacchus, and embellishing them with the agreeable entertainments of music and dancing. After a length of time, the songs advancing in perfection, it was found necessary to give the singer some relief; and that the company might be amused during the pauses of the music, an actor was introduced: his part could be no other than

a single speech, setting forth that he represented Hercules, or Theseus, or some other hero of antiquity, and had performed such or such an illustrious achievement: at the next pause another personated character advanced; at the next, another; but each unrelated and unconnected with the other. This we imagine to be the state of things, till Thespis and Phrynicus had the address to continue the same interlocutor through every pause of the music, and to make him the narrator of one uniform and continued story. The novelty had the good fortune to please; and as the stories were interesting, the songs in honour of Bacchus ceased to amuse, till by degrees they lost their original design, and took their colouring from the intermediate representation. Such was the rude state of tragedy, when Æschylus conceived the great design of forming it into a new species of poetry that should rival even the Epic in dignity. The humble arbour intervove with vine-branches gave place to scenes of astonishing grandeur; the actor, no longer mounted on the cart of Thespis with his face smeared over with lees of wine, or covered with a mask formed from the bark of a tree, now trod a spacious stage, magnificently habited in a robe of honour and the stately buskin; even the mask, that eternal disgrace of the Athenian theatre, wore a new and elegant form, expressive of the character represented. But these

exterior decorations were proofs only of the taste of Æschylus: his superior genius appeared in giving life to the piece, by introducing the dialogue, without which there could be no action; and from this circumstance it is that he is with the highest propriety called the Father of the Drama. It is commonly said, that Æschylus never produced more than two speakers upon the stage at the same time; there are proofs to the contrary, though he generally adhered to that simple plan: but the new part, which the Chorus now took, amply supplied what we should call that poverty of the stage.

The music and the dance could not, without infinite offence, be withdrawn from the gay and lively Athenians: Æschylus therefore retained the ode and music, which properly speaking constituted the original tragedy; but he adapted it to his plan, and interested it in the action; thereby giving a unity of design to the whole, an agreeableness and splendour to the spectacle, and adding the force and spirit of lyric poetry to the gravity and magnificence of the tragic style: but such was the simplicity of ancient manners, supported by truth and decency, that the chorus yet retained the moral and sacred air of the first institution; hence we find it always grave, sententious, sublime, and ardent in the cause of liberty, virtue, and religion.

Æschylus had studied Homer with attention and judgement; from him he might learn propriety and dignity of character, sublimity of conception, and magnificence of expression: and it was impossible for him not to observe the necessity of building his plan upon one great and interesting action; but in this, nature and good sense prescribed a different conduct to the tragic and the epic poet. In the closet the mind may be agreeably entertained by the epic muse, whilst she leads us backwards and forwards through the various fortunes of her hero, and sometimes makes excursions in pursuit of incidental adventures; whilst the imagination loves to attend her in her flights, and disdains to be confined by the narrow limits of time and place. But where the poetic imitation is made by action, and represented at once to the eye, a severer discipline becomes necessary; that faithful monitor checks the rovings of fancy, exacts a sober regard to unity of time and place, and demands a simpler plan: the good sense of Æschylus led him to observe this; and in allusion to it he often used to say, with much modesty, that his tragedies were only single dishes taken from the great feast of Homer.

But if the Tragic Muse lost any thing in the regions of imagination, she found herself amply recompensed by the empire she acquired over the passions; the imitation of nature is her province,

as well as the Epic Muse's; and this imitation is stronger and more perfect in action than in narration. Æschylus, by introducing the dialogue and engaging the chorus in the interest of the drama, gave birth to action properly so called, and placed the actors in such a lively manner before the eyes of the spectators, that they suffered themselves to be agreeably deceived, they forgot that the high-wrought scene was fictitious, and entered into the interests and passions of the persons represented with real emotion. This also required a different conduct in the tragic and the epic poet: the province of the latter is to instruct and delight; and he marches on to his end with a majestic pace through the extensive regions of moral, passion, and description: Æschylus perceived that the drama is confined to one point of place, and one point of time; that therefore its business is to advance with rapidity, and seize the heart at once: the passions then are its peculiar province. It is finely conceived by P. Brumoy that Æschylus represented the Epos to his mind as a majestic queen seated on her throne, her brow shaded with clouds, but so as to discover great designs and wonderful revolutions: whilst his strong imagination figured Tragedy as bathed in tears, her poniard in her hand, attended by Terror and Pity, preceded by Despair, and followed by Woe.

This great master was well acquainted with the

human heart; he found it more averse to misery than desirous of happiness, and tremblingly alive to the shocks of fear, that gives us continual notice of the evils inseparable from human life. Closely allied to this passion is another, that makes the heart recoil at the sight of those miseries which befall another, and to which we are ourselves equally liable. Terror and pity then are the strongest, the most common, and therefore the most dangerous, of all the passions; they overwhelm the human heart, render it incapable of bearing up against the repeated impressions of ills, and of discharging with a proper degree of firmness the necessary duties of life. To *purge* these passions, to take away their pernicious qualities, and preserve whatever they have of useful, is the business in common of the philosopher and the poet; but these effect their ends by different means; the former applies himself to the understanding by the cool deductions of reason; the poet plays the passions against themselves, expels terror by terror, and pity by pity, and makes the weapon, that gave the wound, perform the cure. The evils, of which we are either spectators or sufferers in the larger theatre of human life, strike the heart with a terror that crushes all its powers, or with a pity that dissolves them: but in the mimic scene the poet by captivating the imagination has the address to convey certain sensations of pleasure, of which we cannot

divest ourselves, and thereby interests our attention to the fictitious scenes, spreading over the soul that most exquisite of all its feelings, a calm dignity of grief that at once chastises and refines it, and thereby teaching the heart to support its own afflictions with a manly fortitude, or to feel for the afflictions of others with a sensibility corrected by reason. These are so evidently the effects of the ancient drama, that they are from thence deduced as rules for its construction; and to refuse the great poet the honour of having this design in the plan of his tragedies, would be as violent an injustice as to deny that the great painter(1), when he delineated the dying hero, intended to impress us with a reverence of his unshaken fortitude, and to awake in our breasts the passions of admiration, love, pity, and grief, which are so strongly marked in the countenances and attitudes of his surrounding friends.

Thus tragedy owes its existence to the creative hand of Æschylus: like his own Prometheus, he not only gave it being and form, but animated it with the brightest ray of ethereal fire; leaving posterity to admire the force of his genius, and to doubt whether he was ever excelled, or even equalled, till our Shakespear arose blessed with a happier invention and more extensive powers. It

(1) Mr. West, in his picture of the Death of General Wolfe.

is pleasant however to observe in what manner some writers, who would take it ill to be denied the first rank in criticism, speak of this author. Sublimity of conception, magnificence of style, and the high tragic spirit, they graciously allow him; in this they safely build upon the judgement of Longinus, Horace, and Quintilian, from whence there is no appeal: the same judgement had also pronounced him sometimes harsh and incorrect; and so, without adverting to the meaning of these great critics, that Longinus is speaking of the boldness of his imagery, and Quintilian, as if commenting on Horace, of his style, which had not yet acquired its just accuracy and correctness, they carry the censure into the composition of his tragedies, which they represent as wild, irregular, and frequently fantastic; his plots, as rude and inartificial; his scenes, as unconnected and ill-placed; his characters, as strongly marked, but *all* partaking of that wild fierceness which is the characteristic of the author. Some, and amongst these are the best French critics, represent him as difficult, obscure, and in some places scarcely to be understood: another tells us that his thoughts rise in a natural succession; that instead of being perplexed, one runs along with him, nay often before him: we are indeed gravely recommended to take his soul and genius, in some degree, along with us; that does not fall to the share of every reader, nor

of every critic; but to an acumen, that finds no obscurity in Lycophron, no wonder that Æschylus is even familiar.

The amiable candour of a fine writer, who has joined an accurate taste to the deepest penetration, and the finest sensibility to the most chastised judgement, teaches us thus to apologize for heaven-born genius, that acts from something superior and antecedent to rules: "Great indulgence is due to "the errors of original writers, who, quitting "the beaten track which others have travelled, "make daring incursions into unexplored re- "gions of invention, and boldly strike into the "pathless sublime: it is no wonder if they are "often bewildered, sometimes benighted: yet "surely it is more eligible to partake the pleasure "and the hazard of their adventures, than still to "follow the cautious steps of timid imitators "through trite and common roads. Genius is of "bold enterprising nature, ill adapted to the formal "restraints of critic institutions, or indeed to lay "down to itself rules of nice discretion."—*Essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear.*—— But even this generous apology is seldom wanted for Æschylus, except in his tragedy of Prometheus: there indeed the poet has given free scope to his unbounded imagination, and exerted the strength and ardour of his genius with a wild and terrible magnificence; the limits of this world were

not sufficient for its extensive and daring spirit, but it made excursions beyond the walks of mortal man: each personated character is a divinity, and the illustrious sufferer an ancient god of the high and haughty race of Titan, unworthily punished for his benevolence, and prescient that no submission could mitigate the severity of his fate; here that horrid grandeur of the scene has a peculiar propriety; and the reader of taste does not wish to see Prometheus abate any thing of that unconquerable spirit, with which he defies the Thunderer. In Æschylus, the sublime is truly expressive of the elevation of his mind: born with a soul of fire, and animated with whatever is great and noble, all his ideas are magnificent and full of energy; what he conceived boldly he expressed with a correspondent dignity of style; as his judgement informed him that manners in tragedy would admit a stronger colouring than in the epos, because there every thing speaks to the eye and the heart, so he gave it at once a higher tone and greater pomp of diction; this *perhaps* he has carried to an excess; his epithets are sometimes harsh and turgid, and by endeavouring always to support an elevation of style he has rendered it what P. Brumoy well expresses by "quelquefois gigantesque." But this is to be understood only of his diction: his images, with all their magnificence, never overstep the modesty of nature; they are in-

deed conceived with that inimitable fire, and expressed with such a daring sublimity, that it requires no small portion of the high poetic spirit to attend him through his boundless flights; and this is one principal reason of that obscurity which is complained of in his choral Odes: but to assert from hence that his figures often obscure his sense rather than enlighten it, is to speak the language of tasteless criticism, that meditates its frigid lucubrations over the midnight lamp, leaving true genius, like the eagle, to soar undazzled by the blazing sun when he "glows with unmitigated "day."

We have lately been told, that if we consider the state of the Drama when Æschylus undertook to reform and improve it, we shall behold him with admiration: if we compare him with his two illustrious successors, he hides his diminished head, and appears far less conspicuous. But this judgement was unknown to ancient Greece: the state of Athens paid honours to Æschylus which never were granted to any other poet: Aristophanes, who certainly was not deficient in taste, gave the preference to Æschylus; and Lycurgus, to whom the poetic world is so greatly indebted, erected statues alike to Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and ordered their tragedies to be transcribed and preserved together. In pronouncing on their comparative merit, the best critics assign to Æs-

chylus the high tragic dignity, to Sophocles harmonious elegance, to Euripides the moral and pathetic. As the temper of the times must always have a great influence on the genius of their poets, we may in some measure account for this difference of character from the different state of Athens in the periods when these three great writers composed their tragedies; for though they were contemporaries, that is, were all alive at the same time, yet the circumstances of the public had in that short time received a very considerable change. Whilst Æschylus was in the vigour of his age, the generous glow of liberty and the high martial spirit blazed out with the brightest ardour; it was successful; and Athens was the proud scene of conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils: Æschylus had borne an active and honourable part in these great engagements; his genius was naturally sublime and daring; the spirit of the times called forth the spirit of the poet, was highly flattered by it, and in return received it with the greatest pleasure and warmest applause.—The penetrating writer before cited in apologizing for the irregularities of Shakespear, has this fine remark, "If perfect and faultless composition is ever to be expected from human faculties, it must be at some happy period, when a noble and graceful simplicity, the result of well regulated and sober magnanimity, reigns through the general manners. Then

" the muses and the arts, neither effeminately de-
" licate, nor audaciously bold, assume their highest
" character, and in all their compositions seem to
" respect the chastity of the public taste, which
" would equally disdain quaintness of ornament,
" or the rude neglect of elegance and decorum.
" Such periods had Greece!" And such was the precise period in which Sophocles wrote: the high national spirit had as yet suffered no abatement; but the war had now nothing dangerous or peculiarly interesting in it; and Athens was at leisure to cultivate the fine arts with a greater degree of exactness, and to give them a polish and perfection unknown to more busy and tumultuous times; hence the correct and elegant Sophocles. The Athenians had now an opportunity in the calm of peace to enjoy the riches which they had acquired in the Persian war; nor were they of a disposition to neglect the enjoyment: this of course brought on a greater refinement of taste, and a softer delicacy of sentiment; but the ancient simplicity of manners was not yet corrupted; it only became more elegant, and formed the pathetic Euripides, the greatest master of the tender passions: and happily for the cause of virtue, the chaste and philosophic friend of Socrates might well be trusted with his empire over them. If then the glorious scenes of war and conquest were peculiarly fa-

vourable to the bold and fiery genius of Æschylus, "the period, when Sophocles and Euripides "wrote, was that in which the fine arts and polite "literature were in a degree of perfection, which "succeeding ages have emulated in vain," till an amiable writer of our own, by a happy effort of "heaven-born genius" regulated by the most chastised judgement, united the powers of the three illustrious Grecians, and has charmed us with the tenderness of Euripides in Elfrida, with the force of Æschylus, and the correctness and harmony of Sophocles in Caractacus, adding from his own stores a richness and a grace with which the severity of the Athenian drama was unacquainted.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged merit of this truly original writer, he seems to have been little studied, even by the learned of these later ages: of all our other poets, Milton and Mr. Gray are the only two that have imitated his manner, and caught the fire of his genius; unless we may add to them our sublime Collins. A minute examination of the particular images, which those noble writers may seem to have glanced at in Æschylus, would be equally uncandid and invidious; it is more agreeable and more just to observe, that from whatever sparks they kindled "the muses' vestal "fires," they had genius of their own to "fan

" them to that dazzling blaze of song," which must always make them the glory of English poetry.

Those who are best acquainted with Æschylus in the original language, will be most sensible of the difficulties of presenting him properly to the English reader; the translator saw and felt them enough. In a language that has so long ceased to be spoken, many peculiar elegances must escape even those that read it with the greatest accuracy; and many of those which are observed, will necessarily lose the richness of their colouring, when copied into another language; and this must always be the case where the whole beauty depends upon the choice and arrangement of words and syllables constituting an inimitable harmony of expression. " Un tour en toute langue," says the excellent Brumoy, " vaut souvent une pensée, et " en est véritablement une. Mais c'est une mane " qui fond, une phantôm qui s'evanoüit, ou du " moins une fleur qui se fanne dans une langue " étrangére." There are many instances of this in the choral Odes: these too are often so difficult, that the translator cannot flatter himself that he has always reached the precise meaning of the original, though directed by the penetrating sagacity of the very learned Pauw, to whom he most gratefully acknowledges the highest obligations: and, what is particularly to be lamented, even

these small remains of Æschylus have come down to us so injured by the depredations of time, that in many passages the happiest conjecture is the best criticism. Yet the translator was not discouraged: he had an ambition to present this noble author to the English reader, and flattered himself that his attempt would be acceptable to the public: animated with this pleasing hope, he undertook and went through the arduous work; but when he reflects upon the generous encouragement he has met with from so many persons of the highest rank, as well as of the first reputation in literature, he thinks it the truest mark of respect, and the best thanks for the honour they have done him, to assure them that he trembles whilst he publishes what he wrote with ardour; trembles lest the translation should be false to his own wishes, and unworthy of their patronage: his wishes are to please; and in a work of such difficulty there is some degree of merit even in the attempt; and this is all he presumes to claim. Should he however be so happy as to succeed, and be thought to deserve the approbation of the public, to which he now with the greatest diffidence appeals, this will animate him with the most sanguine hope of further success in the long promised translation of Euripides; to that he now returns. If an apology for these studies be necessary in respect to his years and profession, he begs leave

to make it in the words of Tully: "Ego vero "fateor, me his studiis esse deditum. Ceteros "pudeat, siqui ita se litteris abdiderunt, ut nihil "possint ex his neque ad communem afferre "fructum, neque in adspectum lucemque pro- "ferre. Me autem quid pudeat, qui tot annos "ita vivo, ut ab nullius unquam me tempore aut "commodum, aut otium meum abstraxerit, aut "voluptas avocarit, aut denique Somnus retar- "darit? Quare quis tandem me reprehendat, "aut quis mihi jure succenseat, si, quantum "ceteris ad suas res obeundas, quantum ad "festos dies ludorum celebrandos, quantum ad "alias voluptates, et ad ipsam requiem animi et "corporis conceditur temporum: quantum alii "tribuunt tempestivis conviviis; quantum de- "nique aleæ, quantum pilæ; tantum mihi egomet "ad hæc studia recolenda sumpsero?"

PRO ARCHIA POETA.

Scarning,
September 8, 1777.

TO MRS. MONTAGU.

MADAM,

WHEN you first expressed to me your desire, that notes explanatory of the ancient mythology, history, and customs, might be added to the translation of Æschylus, it surprised me that you, who certainly want notes as little as any person alive, should be the first to ask for them; and I wished to be excused from the task, as conscious to myself, that, though I might be so happy as to entertain the public, I could have no pretensions to instruct it, not presuming to think, that I know more than every one knows, or at least ought to know: your politeness would not admit my plea, but you persevered in your request; I might more properly call it your command, for as such I shall always receive even a hint from Mrs. Montagu. In consequence of this, I have now the honour of presenting to you such remarks, as occurred to me upon a careful review of my author; these may possibly be of service to the less informed reader,

and for such notes in general, and even translations, are principally intended: thus far all may be well; but *your* expectations must be disappointed; for such writing is not in its nature amusing, and you want no information which the writer is capable of giving.

I know your active mind wishes to penetrate through the allegorical covering, which the philosophers, poets, and priests of ancient times threw over their physical, moral, and theological inquiries; but the boast of Isis yet remains, and no mortal hath removed her veil. The misfortune is, almost all the monuments of Egyptian learning are lost, and of the Egyptian gods nothing remains but fable; the light, which we receive upon these subjects, is chiefly derived from the Greek writers, and this by no means pure; they were indeed enough acquainted with Egypt to acquire from thence a turn for mythologizing, but we may observe, that it did not always sit easy upon them; ill instructed in the antiquities of their own country, they have transmitted to us a confused heap of uncertain traditions; and these, by falling into the hands of the poets, are become still more extravagant; the consequence of which is, they have multiplied doubts, to which one would willingly prefer the most profound ignorance. You would be the more convinced of the justness and good sense of this observation of the learned and excellent M. le

Count Caylus, could you bear to read the celebrated treatise of Plutarch concerning Isis and Osiris, where you would find such a mixture of history and fable, allegory and explication, reasoning and absurdity, as would deter you from further inquiry; yet Plutarch was one of the most learned and inquisitive persons of his age, and in these researches he had means of information, which we can never have. Yet for our times these discoveries seem to have been reserved; we have writers on mythology in abundance; and though they differ in their explications, yet they agree in an unclassical disregard to antiquity and truth, and in a barbarous attempt to demolish all the monuments of Egypt and Greece, and with their materials some to repair the temple of Jerusalem, some to build up systems of their own; these indeed are un peu bizarres, and what one of them says of the others, we may with equal reason apply to them all, "On "cherche quelque lumiere, et l'on ne voit qu' "amas indigeste d'une vaste érudition et l'abus le "plus étrange des langues, que l'on honora faus- "sement du nom de Science etymologique."

And would you have me venture to tread this treacherous soil of mythology; or have you a wish to see me pictured, like that great Mystagogue, Alexander Ross, in the temple of Apollo, my pontifical robe trailing on the pavement, my philosophical beard waving over my breast, my front

ploughed with many a deep remark, and a great church-door key in my hand, which after all opens to no knowledge?

But since notwithstanding my nolo episcopari, you have called me forth to the office of Hierophant, I must enter upon it by declaring, that whoever he be that wishes to give, or to form any rational idea of the mythology of the ancients, he must first acquaint himself with the religion of the earliest ages, its progressive corruption through the three greater species of idolatry, and their mode of representing things by hieroglyphic characters; for from hence arose this marvellous entassement of mythology, symbol, and allegory.

Religion is natural to the human mind; and when the early ages had sunk to that miserable blindness as to lose sight of the true God, who revealed himself to their first progenitor, they looked up to the heavens, and struck, with admiration of the nature of the universe, supposed the sun and moon to be the eternal and first Gods. The voice of antiquity is uniform in this; the earliest account we have is from the Fragment of Sanchoniatho, which tells us, that (1) Æon and Protogonus in times of drought stretched their hands to the heavens towards the sun; for this they esteemed as God the sole lord of the heaven. As Diodorus

(1) Αἰῶνα καὶ Πρωτόγονον ἀυχμῶν γενομένων τὰς χεῖρας ὀρέγειν εἰς οὐρανὸν πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον. τοῦτον γὰρ, φησὶ, θεὸν ἐνόμιζον μόνον οὐρανοῦ κύριον.

Siculus tells us the same thing of the Egyptians, so Herodotus gives us a similar account of the ancient (2) Persians and Libyans; this Hyde calls the first interpolation: and Plato (3) says, that the earliest Grecians worshipped the sun, and the moon, and the earth, and the stars, and the heaven, as many barbarians do now. Thus elementary worship was the first species of idolatry.

When men were drawn from a savage life to the more civilized state of society, those virtues

(Or in arts, or arms
Diffusing blessings, or averting harms)

which had made a prince the father of his people, induced them out of gratitude and reverence to deify him after his decease, and to pay him divine honours: thus Sanchoniatho tells us, that (4) when Hypsistus was killed by wild beasts, he was deified, and his children made libations and sacrifices to him. And in what other sense can we understand Hesiod, when he speaks of the sacred race of the immortal gods (5), which were born of the earth; and of the earth as producing the heaven that it

(2) Θύουσι δὲ Ἡλίῳ καὶ Σελήνῃ μούνοισι· τούτοισι μὲν νυν πάντες Λίβυες θύουσι.—L. iv. c. 188.

(3) In Cratylo.

(4) Ὕψιστος ἐπ συμβολῆς θηρίων τελευτήσας ἀφιερώθη, ᾧ καὶ θοας καὶ θυσίας οἱ παῖδες ἐτελέσαν.

(5) Κλέιετε δ' ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
Οἱ Γῆς ἐξεγένοντο.—V. 104.
Γαῖα δὲ τοι πρῶτον μὲν ἐγείνατο ἶσον ἑαυτῇ
Οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντ', ἵνα μιν περὶ πάντα καλύπτοι,
Ὄφρ' εἴη μακάρεσσι θεοῖς ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεί.—V. 125.

might be the seat of the immortal gods? Tully in the first book of his Tusculan Disputations, arguing for the existence of the soul after death, proves from the pontifical law, and the inviolable ceremonies of sepulture, that death is not a privation of being, but a migration of life, which leads illustrious persons to the skies; he instances in Romulus, and says that Rome derived this opinion from Greece; that not only Hercules, Bacchus, Castor and Pollux, Leucothea, and their own Matuta, but that even the Dii majorum gentium would be found by tracing the antiquities of Greece, to have been advanced from mortals to be gods. Yet M. Court de Gebelin could assure us, that antiquity never deified dead men. "On a pretendu qu'ils "avoient etabli pour faire voir que ces Dieux "etoient tous des hommes qui avoient été déïfiés "à cause des services qu'ils avoient rendus au "genre humain. Mais il faudroit pour que cela "pût être adopté, qu'on en trouvât de preuves "dans l'Antiquité, ce qui est impossible, l'An-"tiquité n'ayant jamais déïfié des hommes."—MONDE PRIMITIF, p. 311.—Whatever antiquity has done in this case, his system required that it should not have done it; and what can stand before a system?

Yon golden sun blazing in all its splendour, the silver regent of the night, the canopy of heaven spangled with stars, the violence of the winds, the

immensity of the ocean, might astonish the minds of untutored barbarians: and if one should be inclined to forgive them for adoring the thundering Jupiter, the majestic Juno, the elegant Apollo, the accomplished Minerva, the beautiful Venus, the Muses and the Graces, and such other of their deities as showed their fine taste at least, if not their good sense; yet what shall we say to their Divine Bull, their Divine Heifer, their dog-headed Anubis, and all that herd of monsters which disgraced the religion of Egypt? Yet such was the depravation of the human mind, that having lost its sense of the true God, it first fixed on elementary worship, then descended to human, and at last sunk to brutal; though, in justice to the inventors of this third species of idolatry, we must observe, that the animal itself was not originally worshipped, but its figure as symbolical of the other two species. This certainly took its rise from the Egyptian hieroglyphics, which were prior to alphabetic writing, and represented one thing by another: thus horns were the symbol of power; hence (6) Hermes placed on the head of Isis a helmet formed with the horns of a bull; and a heifer being in Egypt the well-known symbol of Fertility, this their tutelary goddess is represented sometimes as a most beautiful woman with the horns of a heifer, sometimes with

(6) Ἑρμῆν δὲ περιθεῖναι βούκρανον αὐτῇ (Ἴσιδι) ηράνος. De Iside et Osiride.

the head of a heifer, and sometimes entirely as a heifer. Hence the Iö of the Grecians.

But a practice, which naturally enough took its rise from this mode of representation, was afterwards encouraged by the priests with a different view: as mankind grew more inquisitive and more enlightened, they had reason to fear, that the origin of their hero gods might be detected, which would of course greatly weaken the veneration in which they were held, and have a tendency to subvert the public religion; but the symbolic worship, by adding mystery to their theology, and keeping the truth out of sight, would at least support, if not increase the veneration; therefore the more impenetrable the obscurity was made, the better would its end be answered.

This end was likewise effected, and the people were more easily reconciled to hero-worship by another method, which led them to support the new idolatry on the old, by giving the deified mortal the name of the planet, and inversely by giving the planet the name of the new god; thus Osiris was the sun, and the sun was Osiris. So Sanchoniatho tells us, that (7) Chronus, i. e. Saturn, after his decease was hallowed into the planet of Saturn; and Plutarch says, that the Egyptian priests affirm that the bodies of the (8) gods, such as were not of im-

(7) Κρόνος—εἰς τὸν Κρόνου ἀστέρα καθιερωθείς.

(8) Οἱ δὲ ἱερεῖς λέγουσι τὰ τῶν θεῶν, ὅσοι μὴ ἀγέννητοι μηδὲ ἄφθαρτοι, σώματα

mortal origin and incorruptible, were deposited with them; but that their souls shined stars in the heaven; some therefore expressly say, that Osiris was the sun, by the Greeks called Sirius; and that Isis was the moon, represented under both characters by the same image; that her horns were resemblances of the moon, and that she was habited in a black stole, to denote her occultations, in which she wanders seeking the sun. I have somewhere seen an image of this goddess, on which the horns are perfectly lunar, and so formed that the blank disc of the moon is faintly shadowed within their circle.

And now, Madam, your Hierophant having presumed to conduct you through these probationary labours,

> Obscure through dreary shades, that lead
> Along the waste dominions of the dead:
> As wander travellers in woods by night,
> By the moon's doubtful and malignant light;
> When Jove in dusky clouds involves the skies,
> And the faint crescent shoots by fits before their eyes.
>
> Æn. vi. DRYDEN.

You are prepared to enter the mystic dome, where,

παρ' αὐτοῖς κεῖσθαι καμόντα καὶ θεραπεύεσθαι, τὰς δὲ ψυχὰς ἐν οὐρανῷ λάμπειν ἄστρα.—Εἰσὶ δέ οἱ τὸν Ὄσιριν ἄντικρυς ἥλιον εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι Σείριον ὑπ' Ἑλλήνων λέγοντες: τὴν δ' Ἶσιν οὐχ ἑτέραν τῆς σελήνης ἀποφαίνοντες, ἓν γὰρ τῶν ἀγαλματῶν αὐτῆς, τὰ μὲν περασφόρα τοῦ μενοειδοῦς γεγονέναι μιμήματα, τοῖς δὲ μελανοστόλοις ἐμφαινόυσι τὰς κρύψεις καὶ τοὺς περισκιασμούς, εν οἷς διώκει ποθοῦσα τεθούσα τὸν ἥλιον.—De Iside et Osiride.

I hope, you will not be alarmed at the various monsters that present themselves before you; they are empty phantoms all,

Forms without bodies and impassive air.

Neither will you wonder to find them here: every thing is in its proper order. As the human mind advanced in knowledge, these symbolical representations were too gross to pass upon the inquisitive as proper objects of their religious adoration; the priests therefore, who were now deeply interested in the craft and the vanity of philosophizing, attempted to cover the absurdity of these brute-figured deities, by pretending that they were mythological allegories, which veiled all the great truths of theology, ethics, and physics. Thus Sanchoniatho, who had told us, that Taaut, the Egyptian Hermes, imitating Ouranus, formed the figures of the gods in sacred characters (where we find this deity the patron rather of the ingenious Carlini and the goddess-making Reynolds, than of Poor Robin and Vincent Wing), tells us also (9); that the son of Thabion, the earliest Phœnician Hierophant, allegorized all these things, and mixed them with physical and elementary ideas. In this state they passed to the Grecians, whose volatile

(9) Θεὸς Τάαυτος, μιμησάμενος τὸν Οὐρανόν, τῶν θεῶν ἄψεις, Κρόνε τε καὶ Δαγῶνος, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν διετύπωσεν τοὺς ἱεροὺς τῶν στοιχείων χαρακτῆρας.—— Ταῦτα παντα ὁ Θαβίωνος παις πρῶτος τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος γεγονοτων Φοινίκων ἱεροφάντης ἀλλεγορήσας, τοῖς τε φυσικοῖς καὶ κοσμικοῖς πάθεσιν ἀναμίξας.

and inventive genius, added fable to mythology, and extravagance to allegory, till, as Mr. Bryant expresses it, " we find the whole, like a grotesque " picture, blazoned high, and glaring with colours, " and filled with groups of fantastic imagery, " such as we see upon an Indian screen; where " the eye is painfully amused; but whence little " can be obtained, which is satisfactory, and of " service." To endeavour to analyze them, " c'etoit employer beaucoup trop d'erudition pour " s'egarer." Let us make the attempt on Prometheus, and we shall soon see that M. Court de Gebelin had reason enough to make this reflection.

The English reader is now well acquainted with the history and character of Prometheus: Æschylus indeed had the good sense to omit the silly tale of the bull's hide and the bones; and Plato in his Protagoras, has told his story in the most agreeable manner: but where in history sacred or profane, where in religion or nature shall we find this worthy? shall we draw him out of Noah's ark? shall we yoke him to the plough in Egypt, thence send him to a mountain to escape the inundation of the Nile, which overspread his province rapid as an *Eagle's* flight, in despair, till Hercules repaired the ravages, and taught the river to confine itself to its channel? shall we find him on Mount Horeb in the person of Moses? or shall

we take up with any one, or with all the fourteen interpretations of Alexander Ross? The civilizing, oneirocritic, and medicinal arts, which he boasts to have taught mankind, show him to have been an Egyptian; they fix him to the age of Osiris, they even mark him to be Osiris himself; for he was the wise and benevolent civilizer (10), he reclaimed his Egyptians from their poor and savage life, he instructed them in agriculture, gave them laws, and taught them to honour the gods. But his name, as well as that of his inconsiderate brother, is purely Greek; and probably he owes his civilizing qualities to the vanity of that people, who had a wonderful propensity to claim to themselves the invention of all the arts of polished life. Had we nothing of his story, but what is so elegantly related by Plato, we should not hesitate to pronounce him an emblem of the Divine Providence in the formation of man; and as such we must accept it, little doubting but that his chains, and the eagle preying on his heart, were wild and extravagant fables superadded to the original sober allegory: no uncommon practice this. Mr. Bryant well accounts for this, when he says, "The history of Prometheus "was certainly taken from hieroglyphics misun-

(10) Βασιλεύοντα δὲ Ὄσιριν Αἰγυπτίους μὲν ἐυθὺς ἀπόρου ζίου καὶ θηριώδους ἀπαλλάξαι, καρπους τε δείξαντα, καὶ νόμους θέμενον αὐτοις, καὶ θέους δείξαντα τιμᾶν.—Plutarch de Is. et Osir.

" derstood, and badly explained, at least from the " sacred devices upon the entablatures of temples. " Prometheus was worshipped by the Colchians " as a deity; and had a temple and high place " called Typhæonia Petra upon Mount Caucasus; " the device upon the portal was Egyptian, an " eagle over a heart; the eagle and the vulture " were the insignia of that country."—The heart was another hieroglyphical character. It were to be wished that this very ingenious and learned gentleman had favoured us with his authority for this interesting circumstance; it would have been more satisfactory to his readers, though his fidelity cannot be suspected: it were also to be wished, that he had stopped here; for beyond this we have no support from antiquity; neither reason nor religion can account for a story so inconsistent with both; and of conjectures we have enough: but the spirit of mythologizing is gone forth, and all flesh is humbled in its sight; gods and men, heaven and earth, the air and the sea, theology, physics, and ethics, and all the monuments of antiquity fall before it:

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale,
Edg'd with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent;

With flow'er-inwoven tresses torn
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn, &c.

I promised that I would introduce the daughter of Inachus to your acquaintance; and if I have been so happy as to explain this one mythological character, it has been by a sober attention to antiquity, under the guidance of a right reverend author, whose comprehensive genius has fathomed all the depths of literature. Could I have found any further support from antiquity, any rational ground on which to follow my inquiries, I should have been equally happy to have been able to give you satisfaction with regard to the other mysterious personages mentioned by Æschylus: instead of this you will give me leave to put you off with a story.

As Socrates one evening was walking with his friend Phædrus on the banks of the Ilyssus, the young man asked whether that was the place whence Boreas was said to have carried off the virgin Orithyia: being shown the place a little lower down the stream, where an altar to Boreas yet stood, he says, But tell me, I conjure you, Socrates, are you persuaded that this mythological narration is true? If I should disbelieve it, as wise men do, the philosopher replies, I should not be guilty of any great absurdity; then I should show my acuteness, and say that the violence of

the north wind drove her down those rocks as she was playing with Pharmacia, and that, perishing there, she was said to have been carried away by Boreas. Those things, my Phædrus, on some accounts, I think agreeable, but they are the inquiries of a studious, laborious man, and of one not perfectly happy; if for no other reason, yet for this, that he would then be under a necessity of adjusting the form of the Centaurs, and next of the Chimæra; then flows in a multitude of Gorgons and Pegasus's, and such like beings inexplicable for their numbers, and monstrous in their absurdity. If any one, who has no faith in these, should attempt to give a solution of each form, though in no elegant manner, he would find it a work that requires much leisure: but I have no leisure for such things: the reason, my friend, is this; I am not yet able, according to the Delphic injunction, to know myself; and it would be ridiculous for me, whilst I am ignorant of this, to be investigating things foreign to my own business and bosom: wherefore bidding farewell to these things, and submitting to what is determined concerning them, I consider what I lately mentioned, not such subjects, but myself, whether I am a monster more multiform and more fiery fierce than Typhon, or a tamer and more simple animal, in my nature partaking of some divine and gentle portion.—PLATO'S PHÆDRUS.

Socrates tells us, that these inquiries are not the task of a very happy man: the Athenian philosopher had his reasons for saying this, but they affect not us: I should be very happy if my inquiries could produce any thing worthy your attention, the study and the labour I should think well employed. And now, Madam, you see how little you are to expect from these notes; yet such as they are, as they were written by your command, to you they are dedicated; as your candour has induced you to approve the translation, I can with the better grace presume to dedicate that also to you: the approbation of Mrs. Montagu is the highest honour any writer can receive; I am not insensible to it; and whilst I thus boast of it to the public, let me express my humblest thanks to you for it.

I am, Madam, with the greatest respect,
Your most obedient servant,

R. POTTER.

Scarning,
11th July, 1778.

A

DISSERTATION

ON

ANTIENT TRAGEDY.

A

DISSERTATION

ON

ANTIENT TRAGEDY.

WHILST the taste, genius, and knowledge of the antients, have been universally felt and acknowledged in every other part of polite literature, it is matter of admiration to consider, that the Greek Theatre should so long have remained in neglect and obscurity. In philosophy, morals, oratory, and heroic poetry, in every art and science, we look back to Greece, as the standard and model of perfection: the ruins of Athens afford, even to this day, fresh pleasure and delight; and nothing but her stage seems to be forgotten by us. Homer, Xenophon, Demosthenes, and many other eminent Greek writers, have of late years put on an English habit, and gained admission even into what is called polite company; whilst Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, still lurk in schools and colleges; and very seldom make their appearance, at least with dirty leaves, in the libraries of the great. To what shall we attribute a judgement so capricious and so unaccountable? Partly, perhaps, to the hasty severity of ignorant foes, and partly to the outrageous zeal of * mis-

* The remarks which are handed down to us on Antient Tragedy, have hitherto, for the most part, consisted of mere verbal criticisms, various readings, or general and trite exclamations of undistinguishing applause, made by dull and phlegmatic commentators, totally void of taste and judgement; add to this, that the old tragedians have been shamefully disguised and misrepresented to the unlearned by the false medium of bad translations.

taken friendship. The fate of Antient Tragedy hath, indeed, been singularly unfortunate: some painters have drawn too flattering a likeness of her; whilst others have presented us with nothing but a caricature; some exalt the Greek drama, as the most perfect of all human compositions, without the least spot or blemish; whilst others affect to call it the infant state of the stage, weak, infirm, and imperfect; and as such, treat it with the highest degree of negligence and contempt: exaggerated thus on the one hand by the extravagant encomiums of injudicious learning, and debased on the other by the rash censures of modern petulance, its real and intrinsic merit hath never been thoroughly known, or candidly enquired into: the best method however in this, as in every other disputed point, is to set aside all prejudice and authority, and determine the cause by our own reason and judgement, from a fair, full, and impartial view of it.

That the spectator may be able to form a proper and complete idea of any object presented to him, it is necessary to place him in such a situation, as that his eye may at once comprehend the whole, and every part of it; for this purpose, I have collected and ranged in order a few materials, which, in the hands of some abler writer, may possibly lay the foundation for a complete history of the Antient Drama; in the mean time, the following sheets confine themselves to, and pretend to no more than, a brief account of the origin and progress of the Greek Tragedy; it's end and purport, the several parts, properties, and conduct of it; the construction, scenery, and decorations of the theatre; to which is added, a transient, but necessary view of the genius, character, and situation, religion, morals, and politics of the people, before whom it was represented; together with a short sketch of the lives and characters of the three great tragedians.

ON THE ORIGIN OF TRAGEDY.

NOTHING is more agreeable to the inquisitive mind, than to trace the gradual improvement of any art or science; to mark the causes of its growth and culture, and pursue it through its various stages of perfection: it is much to be lamented, therefore, that neither Aristotle, nor any other writer on Antient Tragedy, hath given us an exact or regular account of its progress and advancement from the time of its birth to that of its maturity and splendor; the few scattered anecdotes, which remain concerning it, rather serving to awaken our curiosity, than to afford us any full and satisfactory information.

Tragedy was, in its infancy, like every other production of human art, extremely weak, low, and contemptible: that wide and deep stream, which flows with such strength and rapidity through cultivated Greece, took its rise from a small and inconsiderable fountain, which hides itself in the recesses of antiquity, and is almost buried in oblivion: the name alone remains to give us some light into its original nature, and to inform us, that Tragedy, like every other species of poetry, owed its birth to religion.

Tragedy, or the * song of the goat, was only a sacred hymn. Bacchus, we are told, the first cultivator of vines, imparted his secret to a petty prince in Attica, named Icarius, who, happening one day to espy a

* From Τραγος, a goat, and ωδη, a song. The commentators, not content with this most natural and obvious interpretation, have given us several others. Some of them turn Τραγωδια into Τριγωδια, and so derive it from Τρυξ, the lees of wine, with which we are told the actors smeared their faces: others inform us, that Τρυξ signifies new wine, a skin of which was, it seems, usually given to the poet (like the butt of sack to our laureats) as a reward for his labours: but I shall not trouble my reader with the enumeration of their whimsical conjectures.

goat, browzing on his plantations, immediately seized, and offered him up as a sacrifice to his divine benefactor: the peasants assembled round their master, assisted in the ceremony, and expressed their joy and gratitude, in songs and dances on the occasion; the * sacrifice grew into a festival, and the festival into an annual solemnity, attended most probably every year with additional circumstances, when the countrymen flocked together in crowds, and sung in rustic strains the praises of their favourite deity. The rural sacrifice became, in process of time, a solemn feast, and assumed all the pomp and splendor of a religious ceremony; poets were employed by the magistrate to compose hymns or songs for the occasion: such was the rudeness and simplicity of the age, that their bards contended for a prize, which, as † Horace intimates, was scarce worth contending for; being no more than a goat, or skin of wine, which was given to the happy poet, who acquitted himself best in the task assigned to him.

This was probably the period when Thespis first pointed out the tragic path, by his introduction of a new personage, who relieved the Chorus, or troop of singers, by reciting part of some well-known history or fable, which gave time for the Chorus to rest. All

* This story is told by Brumoy, and by twenty others, with little variation. It seems, notwithstanding, to carry with it the air of a fiction, so far as it regards Icarius, who seems only to have been introduced because Icaria was famous for vines, and (as Spon tells us in his voyage to Italy) was the first place where they sacrificed a goat to Bacchus, and also, where tragedies and comedies were first exhibited; but surely the song of the goat might be accounted for, without application to any particular person. Bacchus, being the acknowledged inventor and cultivator of the vine, it was most natural that the first planters should sacrifice to him the destroyers of it; the goat being a creature as remarkably fond of the leaves of the vine, as his sacrificer was of the juice of the grape; we shall find that he fell a victim not to Bacchus alone; and that the poet, as well as the god, came in for a share of him.

‡ Vilem certavit ob hircum. ART. POET.

that the actor * repeated between the songs of the Chorus, was called an episode, or additional part, consisting often of different adventures which had no connection with each other. Thus the chorus, or song, which was at first the only, and afterwards the principal performance, became gradually and insensibly but an inconsiderable, though, as we shall see hereafter, a necessary and ornamental part of the drama.

From this time, we may imagine, the actor or reciter was more attended to than the Chorus; however his part was executed, it had the powerful charms of novelty to recommend it, and quickly obscured the lustre of the Chorus, whose songs were now of a different nature; insomuch, that the original subject of them, the praise of *Bacchus*, was by degrees either slightly mentioned, or totally past over and forgotten: the priests, who, we may suppose, for a long time presided over the whole, were alarmed at so open a contempt of the deity, and unanimously exclaimed, that all this † was nothing to Bacchus; the complaint grew into a kind of proverbial saying, and as such is handed down to us.

From the origin of Tragedy, to the days of Thespis, and from his time to that of Æschylus, all is doubt, conjecture, and obscurity; neither Aristotle, nor any other antient writer, give us the least insight into the state and progress of the Greek drama: if his treatise called Διδασκαλιαι ‡ had reached posterity, it would probably have afforded us much pleasure and instruction: the names of a few, and but a few tragedians, during

* When Tragedy assumed a regular form, these recitations, which, during its imperfect state, were only adventitious ornaments, became the principal and constituent parts of the drama, the subject of them, drawn from one and the same action, retaining their first name of episode.

† ουδεν προς Διονυσον.

‡ This treatise contained an exact account of the names, times, and authors of all the plays that were ever acted.

this dark period, are handed down to us: such were Epigenes *, the Sicyonian, and Pratinas, who wrote fifty plays, thirty-two of which are said to have been satyrical: after Thespis, came his scholar Phrynicus, who wrote nine tragedies, for † one of which we are told he was fined fifty drachmas, because he made it (an odd reason) too deep, and too affecting: there was also another Phrynicus, author of ‡ two tragedies; to these we must add ‖ Alcæus, Phormus, and § Chœrilus; together with Cephisodorus, an Athenian, who wrote the Amazons, and Apollophanes, supposed to have been the author of a tragedy, named Daulis; though Suidas is of another opinion.

Tragedy, during the lives of these writers, had in all probability made but a slow progress, and received very little culture or improvement, when at length the great Æschylus arose, who from this rude and undigested chaos created, as it were, a new world in the system of letters. Poets, and even epic poets there might perhaps have been before Homer; dramatic writers there certainly were before Æschylus; the former, notwithstanding, we may with the utmost propriety style the inventor and father of heroic poetry, and the latter of the antient drama, which before his time doth not appear to have had any form, shape, or beauty. He first introduced dialogue, that most essential part of tragedy, by the addition of a second personage, threw the whole fable into action, and restored the Chorus to its antient dignity.

Æschylus, having, like a tender parent, endowed his darling child with every mental accomplishment,

* The Bacchæ, a tragedy of his, is cited by Athenæus.

† See Strabo, Herodotus, and Plutarch.

‡ Called Andromeda and Erigone.

‖ Mentioned by Macrobius and Pollux.

§ Chœrilus is said to have written no less than a hundred and twenty tragedies.

seemed resolved that no external ornaments should be wanting to render her universally amiable: he cloathed her therefore in the most splendid habit, and bestowed on her every thing that art could procure to heighten and improve her charms. We know, from good authority, that fifty years before his time Thespis exhibited his rude performances in a cart, and besmeared the faces of his actors with the lees of wine, probably to disguise their persons, and give them the appearance of those they represented; but Æschylus, who as being himself author, actor, and manager, took upon him the whole conduct of the drama, did not neglect any part of it; he improved the scenery and decorations, brought his actors into a regular and well-constructed theatre, raised his heroes on the corthunus or buskin, invented the masks, and introduced splendid * habits, with long trains, that gave an air of majesty and dignity to the performers.

From the time when tragedy began to assume a regular form, we find her closely following the steps of epic poetry; all the parts of the epopée, or heroic poem, may be traced in tragedy, though, as Aristotle observes, all the parts of tragedy are not to be found in the epopée; whence the partisans of the stage with some reason conclude, that perfection in the former is more difficult to be attained than in the latter. Without entering into this dispute, we may venture however to style † Homer the source and fountain of the antient drama; from him the tragedians drew the plan, con-

* ——— personæ, pallæque repertor honestæ
Æschylus, & modicis instravit pulpita tignis,
Et docuit magnumque loqui, notique cothurno. HOR.

† Homer, says Aristotle, was the first, who μιμησεις δραματικας επωησε, invented dramatic imitations. 'There was no more left for tragedy (says Lord Shaftesbury) than to erect a stage, and draw his dialogues 'and characters into scenes, turning in the same manner upon one 'principal action or event, with regard to place and time; which was 'suitable to a real spectacle.' See CHARACTERIST. Vol. II.

struction, and conduct of their fables, and not unfrequently the fable itself; to him they applied for propriety of manners, character, sentiment, and diction.

From this æra then, we are to consider tragedy as an elegant and noble structure, built according to the rules of art, symmetry, and proportion; whose every part was in itself fair, firm, and compact, and at the same time contributed to the beauty, usefulness, and duration of the whole edifice, Sophocles and Euripides carefully studied the plan laid down by Æschylus, and by their superior genius and judgement improved it in a short time to its highest state of perfection, from which it gradually declined to the introduction of the Roman drama.

ON THE PARTS OF ANTIENT TRAGEDY.

AMONGST many other erroneous opinions concerning the Greek tragedy, adopted by modern editors and commentators, the unwarrantable division which they have made of it into acts*, is perhaps the most remarkable, as there doth not seem to be the least ground or foundation for it: in the first place, neither Athenæus, nor any of the antient writers, who have given us quotations from the Greek plays, mention the act where the several passages are to be found: which they would most naturally have done, had any such division ever taken place. It may be likewise observed, that the word Act† does not once occur in that treatise of Aristotle, which gives us so exact a definition of every part of the Greek drama; add to this, that the trage-

* See a dissertation on this subject, by Mons. Vatry, in the Hist. de l'Acad. vol. viii. p. 188.

† The word δραμα, which we translate an act, signifies the whole performance, or drama, and could not possibly therefore mean any one particular part of it.

dies themselves carry with them sufficient proof that no such thing was ever thought on by the authors of them; notwithstanding which, * Vossius, Barnes, and several other editors, have discovered an office of the Chorus, which the poet never assigned them, namely, their use in dividing the acts, the intervals of which were supplied by their songs; though it is evident that the business of the Chorus (as will sufficiently appear in the following account of it) was, on the other hand, to prevent any such unnatural pause or vacancy in the drama, as the division into acts must necessarily produce; besides that, if we take the word act in that sense which the modern use of it demands, we shall find it in the Greek tragedies composed sometimes of a single scene and sometimes of half a dozen; and † if the songs or intermedes of the Chorus are to determine the number of acts, the play will consist not always of five, according to our own custom, but at one time of only three, and at another of seven or eight. ‡ Horace has indeed told us, that there should be but five acts; but it does not from thence follow that it always was so: the truth after all is, that this mistake, as well as many others, arose

* Chorus, says Vossius, pars fabulæ post actum, vel inter actum & actum. See Inst. Poet. l. 2.

† On looking into the Chorusses of Sophocles as they stand in the original, we find that the Ajax, besides the κομμοι (which will be explained hereafter) has five, which are thus unequally divided; to the first act two; the second one; the third one; the fourth one; the fifth none at all: the Trachiniæ has six; the Electra but three; and the Philoctetes but one regular song or intermede in the whole play. If it be granted therefore, as I think it is on all hands, that wherever we meet with strophe and antistrophe, and there only, we are to conceive that the Chorus sung, nothing can be more absurd than to make those songs dividers of the acts, when it is evident that the Chorus sung only as occasion offered, and the circumstances of the drama required, which accounts for the irregularity and difference in the numbers of them. If the reader will take the trouble to examine the antient tragedies, he will find what I have said confirmed in every one of them.

‡ Neve minor, neu sit quinto productior actu.

from an error common to almost the whole race of writers and critics on antient tragedy, who have unanimously agreed to confound the Greek and Roman drama, concluding them both to be governed by the same laws, though they are in many parts essentially different: they never allow for the time between Aristotle and Horace, but leap from one to the other with the utmost agility: it is plain, however, from * the reasons here mentioned, that the antient Greek tragedy was one continued representation from beginning to end.

The division into acts therefore is undoubtedly a piece of modern refinement; which, as much may be said on both sides, I shall not stop either to condemn or approve, but proceed to the only division which the antients ever made; a division, which nature points out to this and every other composition, viz. a † beginning, a middle, and an end; or, in the words of Aristotle, the Prologue, the Episode, and the Exode.

The PROLOGUE of antient tragedy, was not unlike the προαυλιον, or overture in music, or the proœmium in oratory, containing all that part of the drama,

* Many other reasons equally forcible might be alleged, some of which the reader will find scattered about in the notes to my translation of Sophocles. I shall only observe here, that the old editions of the Greek tragedies, so far from dividing them into acts, do not so much as make the least separation of the scenes; even the names of the persons are not always properly affixed to the speeches: no notice is taken of the entrances and exits of the actors; the asides are never marked, nor any of the gestures or actions, which frequently occur, pointed out to us in the margin; defects which, however inconsiderable, may mislead the young and injudicious reader, and which ought therefore to be carefully supplied by the critic or translator.

† The cause and design of undertaking any action are, the *beginning*; the effects of those causes and the difficulties we find in the execution of that design are, the middle; the unravelling and resolving those difficulties are, the end. See Bossu's Treatise on Epic Poetry.

which * preceded the first song, or intermede of the Chorus.

What Aristotle calls the prologue should contain, according to the antient critics, all those circumstances which are necessary to be known for the better understanding and comprehension of the whole drama, as, the placing of the scene, the time when the action commences, the names and characters of the persons concerned, together with such an insight into the plot as might awaken the curiosity of the spectator, without letting him too far into the design and conduct of it. This, however easy it may seem at first view, is so difficult, that it has scarce ever been performed to any degree of perfection. Of the Greek tragedians, Sophocles alone seems to have succeeded in this particular, the prologues of † Æschylus being quite rude and inartificial, and those of Euripides, for the most part, tedious and confused.

The EPISODE is all that part of the tragedy, which is between the songs or intermedes of the Chorus:

* Aristotle must certainly be understood to mean not the first entrance, but the first song or intermede of the Chorus; because, as Dacier and other writers have observed, there are tragedies (as the Persæ and Suppliants of Æschylus) where the Chorus enters first on the stage and opens the play: to such therefore, if Aristotle meant the speaking and not the song, there would be no prologue; a contradiction which is avoided by understanding what is here said of the παροδος, or first song, which never begins till the prologue is over, and matter furnished to the Chorus for the intermede.

† According to this rule, the prologues of Æschylus and Euripides will by no means stand the test of examination; that part of the tragedy, which precedes the first song of the Chorus being often employed, by those writers, either in absurd addresses to the spectators, or in the relation of things extremely foreign to the purpose of the drama, frequently anticipating the incidents and circumstances of the play, even sometimes acquainting the audience before-hand with the catastrophe; all of them capital errors, which the superior judgement of Sophocles taught him carefully to avoid.

this answers to our second, third, and fourth act, and comprehends all the intrigue or plot to the unravelling or catastrophe, which in the * best antient writers is not made till after the last song of the Chorus; the conduct and disposition of the Episode may be considered as the surest test of the poet's abilities, as it generally determines the merit, and decides the fate of the drama. Here all the art of the writer is necessary to stop the otherwise too rapid progress of his fable, by the intervention of some † new circumstances that involves the persons concerned in fresh difficulties, awakens the attention of the spectators, and leads them as it were, insensibly to the most natural conclusion and unravelling of the whole.

The EXODE is all that part of the tragedy, which is recited after the Chorus has left off singing; it answers to our fifth act, and contains the unravelling, or catastrophe of the piece; after which it is remarked by the critics, any song of the Chorus would only be tedious and unnecessary, because what is said, when the action is finished, cannot be too short.

* Sophocles, who was certainly the most correct of the three great Tragedians, has, I think, observed this rule in all his plays but two, viz. Ajax and Œdipus Tyrannus; for, if the death of Ajax is the catastrophe of that tragedy, it is over long before the last song of the Chorus; if the leave granted to bury him be the catastrophe, as some critics contend, the episode is confined within its proper limits: but this cannot be allowed, without attributing to this piece what is a still greater blemish, a duplicity of action; a dramatic crime, of which Sophocles in that play I am afraid cannot easily be acquitted. In the Œdipus Tyrannus it is observable that the total discovery of Œdipus's guilt is made before the last song of the Chorus, and becomes the subject of the intermede.

† Brumoy compares the fable of a good tragedy to a large and beautiful temple, which the skill of the architect hath so contrived as to make it appear at first view of much less extent than it really is, wherein the farther you advance, the more you are surprised at the vast intervening space, which the extraordinary symmetry and proportion of its parts had concealed from the eye.

ON THE CHORUS.

We come now to an essential * part of antient tragedy peculiar to itself: whilst every other member of the building is universally admired, and industriously copied by modern architects, this alone hath been rejected and contemned as ungraceful and unnecessary. The Chorus, as I before observed, gave the first hint to the formation of tragedy, and was as it were the corner-stone of the whole edifice: as a religious ceremony, it was considered by the multitude with a kind of superstitious veneration; it is not therefore improbable, that the first authors of the regular drama willingly gave way to popular prejudices, and for this, among many other reasons, incorporated it into the body of the tragedy: accordingly, we find the Chorus of Æschylus resuming it's original office, reciting the praises of the local deities, demi-gods, and heroes, taking the part of distressed virtue, and abounding throughout in all those moral precepts, and religious sentiments, by which the writings of the antients are so eminently and so honourably distinguished.

Various are the arguments that have from time to time been produced by the zealous partizans of antiquity, in favour of the tragic Chorus, the principal of which I shall briefly recapitulate and lay before my readers, begging leave at the same time to premise, that whether a Chorus is defensible with regard to the antient theatre, and whether it should be adopted by the modern, are two very different questions, though generally blended and confused by writers on this subject; the former may perhaps be easily proved, though the latter be left totally undetermined. The

* Aristotle ranks the Chorus amongst what he calls, parts of quantity, and places it after the Exode.

antients thought it highly improbable that any great, interesting, and important action should be performed without witnesses; their chorusses were therefore composed of * such persons as most naturally might be supposed present on the occasion; † persons, whose situation might so far interest them in the events of the fable, as to render their presence useful and necessary; and yet not so deeply concerned as to make them incapable of performing that office, to which they were more particularly appointed, the giving proper advice, and making proper reflections on every thing that occurred, in the course of the drama; for this purpose, a choriphæus, or leader, superintended and directed all the rest, spoke for the whole body in the dialogue part, and led the songs and dances in the intermede. By the introduction of a Chorus, which bore a part in the action, the antients avoided the absurdity of monologues and soliloquies, an error, which the moderns have imperceptibly and necessarily fallen into, from their omission of it: they avoided also that miserable resource of distressed poets, the insipid and uninteresting race of confidantes (a refinement, for which we

* 'A Chorus, interposing and bearing a part in the progress of the 'action, gives the representation that probability and striking resem-'blance of real life, which every man of sense perceives, and feels the 'want of, upon our stage; a want, which nothing but such an expe-'dient as the Chorus can possibly relieve.'

This is the remark of one of the most ingenious and judicious critics, which our own age, or perhaps any other ever produced: the reader will find it, with many others equally just, p. 118 of the first volume of a commentary and notes on Horace's Art of Poetry, and Epistle to Augustus.

† Thus, in the Ajax of Sophocles, the Chorus is composed of the men of Salamis, his countrymen, and companions; in the Electra, of the principal ladies of Mycenæ, her friends and attendants; in the Philoctetes, of the companions of Ulysses and Neoptolemus, the only persons who could with any propriety be introduced. The rest of this writer's plays, and his only, will stand the test of examination by the rule here mentioned.

are indebted to the French theatre) who only appear to ask a foolish question, listen to the secrets of their superiors, and laugh or cry as they are commanded.

But the greatest use and advantage of the Chorus will best appear when we come to consider it in its moral capacity. In that illustrious period, which may be called the golden age of tragedy, the stage was not only the principal, but almost the only vehicle of instruction. Philosophy applied to the liberal arts for their influence and assistance; she appeared in the theatre even before she dictated in the academy, and Socrates is supposed to have delivered many of his excellent precepts by the mouth of his * favourite poet: this sufficiently accounts for the sententious and and didactic part of the antient drama; for all that profusion of moral and religious sentiments, which tires the patience and disgusts the delicacy of modern readers: the critics of those times were of opinion (however they may differ from our own in this particular) that the first and principal characters of the piece were too deeply interested in their own concerns, and too busy in the prosecution of their several designs and purposes, to be at leisure to make moral or political reflections: such, therefore, they very judiciously for the most part put into the mouth of the Chorus; this, at the same time, † prevented the illiterate and

* Hence Euripides was called 'ο επι της σκηνης φιλοσοφος,' 'the philoso-'pher of the theatre,' 'in iis (says Quintilian) quæ a sapientibus tradita 'sunt, ipsis pæne par.' With regard to Socrates, his friendship with this poet is universally known, 'εδοκει συμποιειν Ευριπιδη,' says Diogenes Laertius. The comic poets of that time did not scruple to ascribe several of Euripides's plays to Socrates, as they afterwards did those of Terence to Lælius and Scipio.

† Euripides being obliged to put some bold and impious sentiments into the mouth of a wicked character, the audience were angry with the poet, and looked upon him as the real villain, whom his actor represented: the story is told by Seneca. 'Now if such an audience (says the 'ingenious writer, whom I quoted above) could so easy misinterpret 'an attention to the truth of character into the real doctrine of the

undistinguishing part of the audience, from mistaking the characters, or drawing hasty and false conclusions from the incidents and circumstances of the drama: the poet by the same means leading them, as it were insensibly, into such sentiments and affections as he had intended to excite, and a conviction of those moral and religious truths which he meant to inculcate.

But the Chorus had likewise another * office, which was to relieve the spectator, during the pauses and intervals of the action, by an ode or song adapted to the occasion, naturally arising from the incidents, and ‡ connected with the subject of the drama: here the author generally gave a loose to his imagination, displayed his poetical abilities, and sometimes, perhaps too often, wandered from the scene of action into the regions of fancy; the audience notwithstanding were pleased with this short relaxation and agreeable variety; soothed by the power of numbers and the excellency of the composition, they easily forgave the

' poet, and this too, when a Chorus was at hand to correct and disabuse ' their judgements, what must be the case when the whole is left to the ' sagacity and penetration of the people ?'

* The office of the Chorus is divided by Aristotle into three parts, which he calls παρῳδος, στασιμον, and κομμοι; the parodos is the first song of the Chorus; the stasimon is all that which the Chorus sings after it has taken posssesion of the stage, and is incorporated into the action; and the commoi are those lamentations so frequent in the Greek writers, which the Chorus and the Actors make together. See the second scene of the second act of Ajax, in my translation; Philoctetes, act first, scene third; the Œdipus Coloneus, together with many other parts of Sophocles's tragedies, where the commoi are easily distinguishable from the regular songs of the Chorus.

† ——— Neu quid medios intercinat actus
Quod non proposito conducat & hæreat apte. HOR.

This connection with the subject of the drama, so essentially necessary to a good chorus, is not always to be found in the tragedies of Æschylus and Euripides, the latter of which is greatly blamed by Aristotle for his carelessness in this important particular; the correct Sophocles alone hath strictly observed it.

writer, and returned, as it were, with double attention to his prosecution of the main subject: to this part of the antient Chorus we are indebted for some of the noblest flights of poetry, as well as the finest sentiments that adorn the writings of the Greek tragedians. The number of persons composing the Chorus was probably at first indeterminate, varying according to the circumstances and plot of the drama. Æschylus, we are told, brought no less than fifty into his * Eumenides, but was obliged to reduce them to twelve; Sophocles was afterwards permitted to add three; a limitation which we have reason to imagine became a rule to succeeding poets.

When the Chorus consisted of fifteen, the persons composing it ranged themselves in three rows of five each, or five rows of three; and in this order advanced or retreated from the right hand to the left, which is called † Strophe, and then back from the left to the right, which we call Antistrophe; after which they stood still in the midst of the stage, and sung the Epode. ‡ Some writers attribute the original of these

* In the Eumenides of Æschylus, the Chorus consisted of fifty furies, whose habits, gesture, and whole appearance was, by the art of the poet, rendered so formidable as to frighten the whole audience; an accident which so alarmed the public, that a decree was immediately issued to limit the number of the Chorus.

† It doth not appear that the old tragedians confined themselves to any strict *rules*, with regard to the division of strophe, antistrophe, and epode, as we find the choral songs consisting sometimes of a strophe only, sometimes of strophe and antistrophe, without the epode; the observing reader will find many other *irregularities* of this kind in a perusal of the Greek tragedies.

‡ 'Le Chœur (says Brumoy) alloit de droit à gauche, pour exprimer 'le cours journalier du firmament d'orient en occident, ce tour s'appelloit 'strophe; il declinoit ensuite de gauche à droite, par égard aux planettes, 'qui outre le mouvement commun ont encore le leur particulier d'occi- 'dent vers l'orient, c'etoit l'antistrophe, ou le retour; *enfin le* chœur 's'arretoit au milieu du théâtre pour y chanter un morceau qu'on nom- 'moit epode, & pour marquer par cette situation la stabilité de la 'terre.'

evolutions to a mysterious imitation of the motion of the heavens, stars and planets; but the conjecture seems rather whimsical. The dance, we may imagine, (if so we may venture to call it) was slow and solemn, or quick and lively, according to the words, sentiments, and occasion; and, in so spacious a theatre as that of Athens, might admit of such grace and variety in its motions as would render it extremely agreeable to the spectators: the petulancy of modern criticism has frequently made bold to ridicule the use of song and dance in antient tragedy, not considering (as Brumoy observes) that dancing is, in reality, only a more graceful way of moving, and music but a more agreeable manner of expression; nor, indeed, can any good reason be assigned why they sholud not be admitted, if properly introduced and carefully managed, into the most serious compositions. To say the truth, nothing is more astonishing than the prejudices we entertain, and the partiality we shew, with regard to our own modes and customs: we condemn the chorusses of the antients, which supplied with decency and propriety the vacant parts of the drama; and how do we fill up our own? To be convinced of our injustice and absurdity, let us suppose Sophocles or Euripides transported from the shades of elysium, and entering one of our noisy theatres, between the acts; the audience engaged in bowing or talking to each other, and the music entertaining them with a jig of Vivaldi, or the Roast Beef of old England, how would they be surprised in a few minutes to find, that all this disorder, riot, and confusion, was in the midst of a most pathetic and interesting tragedy, and that the warmest passions of the human heart were broken in upon and enfeebled by this strange and unnatural interruption!

The Chorus continued on the stage during the whole representation of the piece, unless when some very

* extraordinary circumstance required their absence; this obliged the poet to a continuity of action, as the Chorus could not have any excuse for remaining on the spot, when the affair, which called them together, was at an end; it preserved also the unity of time; for if the poet, as † Hedelin observes, had comprehended in his play, a week, a month, or a year, how could the spectators be made to believe that the people, who were before them, could have passed so long a time without eating, drinking, or sleeping? Thus we find, that the Chorus preserved all the unities of action, time, and place; that it prepared the incidents, and inculcated the moral of the piece; relieved and amused the spectators; presided over and directed the music, made a part of the decoration, and in short pervaded and animated the whole; it rendered the poem more regular, more probable, more pathetic, more noble and magnificent; it was indeed the great chain, which held together and strengthened the several parts of the drama, which without it could only have exhibited a lifeless and uninteresting scene of irregularity, darkness, and confusion.

The antient Chorus, notwithstanding, with all its advantages, is not agreeable to every taste; it hath been attacked with great severity, and treated with the utmost contempt; it hath been called arrant pedantry, an excrescency of the drama, a mob of confidants; even writers of approved genius and judgement have said, that it is absurd to imagine the antients would ever have trusted their secrets, especially those of a criminal nature, to all their domestics;

* As the Ajax of Sophocles, where the Chorus leave the stage in search of that hero, and by that means give him an opportunity of killing himself in the very spot which they had quitted, and which could not have been done with any propriety whilst they were present, and able to prevent it: on these occasions, the Chorus frequently divided itself into two parts, or semichorusses, and sung alternately.

† See his Whole Art of the Stage, page 129, of the English translation.

that it is impossible to imagine that fifty, or even fifteen people can keep a secret, fifteen people of the same mind, thought, voice, and expression.

It must be acknowledged, that these critics have selected that part of the office of the Chorus, which is most liable to censure; but even if we allow the objection its full force, it will not suffice to condemn the Chorus itself, which, in the judicious Sophocles, who avoided the errors and absurdities of his contemporaries, is unexceptionable: in that noble author, nothing is entrusted to the Chorus, which ought to be concealed; nor any thing concealed which ought to be imparted to them; we might therefore, perhaps, with equal justice, banish from our own stage, the general practice of soliloquies, because Shakespear hath frequently drawn them out to an immoderate length, as utterly condemn the whole antient Chorus, because Euripides hath, in two or three of his plays, made an improper use of it.

'Who shall decide, when doctors disagree?'

Some applaud the Chorus with a kind of enthusiastic rapture, whilst others endeavour to sink it into universal contempt: for my own part, I cannot but think it absolutely necessary on the antient stage, and that it might be rendered useful and ornamental, even on our own. I am, notwithstanding, far from being of opinion, that it should be admitted constantly and indiscriminately into the modern theatre; the use of it must depend entirely on the subject: certain it is, that there are many in our own history, as well as in that of other nations, where a Chorus might be introduced with the utmost propriety; but if, after all, fashion and prejudice will not suffer them to appear on the stage, they may at least gain admission to the closet; thither let the reader of true taste and judgement carry Elfrida and Caractacus, written on the antient model, and compare them with any of those tinsel flimsy per-

formances that have lately assumed the name of tragedies, which have owed all their success to the false taste of the age, joined to the real merit of the actors in the representation of them.

ON THE VERSE, RECITATION, AND MUSIC OF ANTIENT TRAGEDY.

THE art of poetry was considered by the antients as a part of that general system, which they termed the μελοποιοα, or melody, and was in reality the art of making verses proper to be sung: they looked upon words not only as signs of particular ideas, but as sounds also, enabled by the assistance of music to express all the passions of the human mind. When in the descriptive parts of the drama a dreadful or disagreeable object was to be represented, the words were formed of such harsh and jarring syllables, as by grating on the ear, might best impress the exactest representation of it; and in like manner, when the grand, the beautiful, or the tender was to be set before the eyes of the spectator, the language was carefully and even painfully adapted to it. The Greeks, who were extremely solicitous to cultivate and improve their language to the highest degree of perfection, took more than ordinary care in the formation of their verse; the quantity of every syllable was carefully ascertained; different words, different dialects, and different feet, were appropriated to different species of poetry; and none infringed on the rights and privileges of another: Tragedy indeed, as the sovereign, assumed a kind of peculiar title to them all; every species of verse was occasionally introduced to adorn and beautify the drama. The Iambic was generally made use of in the body of the piece, as approaching, according to the judgement of Aristotle, nearest to common discourse,

and therefore most naturally adapted to the dialogue; this rule, however, is not constantly and invariably observed, but sometimes departed from with judgment: the metre is frequently changed, not only in the songs of the chorus, but in other places; and that generally in the most interesting and impassioned parts of the drama, where, it may be here observed, it is most probable that the music and instruments accompanying the verse were changed also; a happy circumstance for the poet, as it must have afforded an agreeable relief to the audience, who would naturally be fatigued by the repetition of the same sounds, be they ever so harmonious. * If our own times, manners and taste would admit of such variations, what additional beauties would they reflect on the British theatre! but such a change of metre in serious dramatic performances is rendered absolutely impossible, as well from many other obstacles, as from the † poverty of our language, when put in comparison with those of antiquity; particularly that of Greece, whose superiority over us in this respect is so remarkably visible. On the antient stage, the length or shortness of every syllable was, as it were, fixed and determined, either by nature or by use; hence the song had a ne-

* Since the expulsion of tragedies in rhyme, of all things doubtless the most absurd, some of our best poets have introduced what is called a tag, consisting of three or four couplets, at the end of every act, to relieve the ear from the monotony of blank verse; but even this is now exploded, and we are confined to the repetition of the same continued metre, from beginning to end.

† 'It must be confessed, (says a very judicious writer) that all the 'modern languages fall infinitely short of the antients in this point; both 'the Greek and Latin tongues assigned for the pronunciation of each 'syllable an exact measure of time, in some longer, in some shorter, and 'so variously intermixed those two different measures in the same word, 'as furnished means for that variety of versification, to which we are 'altogether strangers.' See a book entituled, Observations on Poetry, printed for Dodsley in 1738, p. 108, in the chapter on versification; where the reader will meet with many sensible remarks on this subject.

cessary and agreeable conformity with common discourse, which rendered it more intelligible: our * musicians, in the composition of their songs, make short syllables long, and long short, as it suits the air, or recitative; and whilst the music pleases the ear, the words frequently offend it: if the poet and musician were always united in one person, which very seldom happens, this inconvenience might, with all the disadvantages of our language, be in a great measure lessened, if not entirely removed.

It is more than probable, and nearly demonstrable, that the theatrical declamation of the antients was composed and written in notes, and that the whole play, from beginning to end, (except the commoi and chorusses) were in a kind of † recitative, like our modern operas; that it was ‡ accompanied with music throughout, and that the reciter had little else to do, than carefully to observe the directions of the poet; the quantity of every word was ascertained, the time, duration, and rhythmus of every syllable fixed by the

* 'Our different cadences, (says the elegant author of Elfrida) our 'divisions, variations, repetitions, without which modern music cannot 'subsist, are entirely improper for the expression of poetry, and were 'scarce known to the antients.'

† It is the opinion of P. Menestrier, and several other learned men, that the custom of chaunting in churches was originally taken from the antient stage: as the theatres were open at the commencement of the Christian æra, it is not improbable, but that the common people might recite our Saviour's passion after the manner of the tragedians; certain however it is, that in our own nation, as well as in many others, the first tragedies exhibited were on religious subjects, and in some places continue so even to this day.

‡ The μελοποιια or melody, is mentioned by Aristotle, as one of the six essential parts of tragedy, and consequently must have been considered by him not as confined to the chorus, but diffusing itself through the whole drama. In the 19th chapter of his problems, he asks why the tragic chorusses never sing in the hypodorian, or hypophrygian mood, which are both employed in the scenes; from which passage, as well as many others that might be quoted, it is evident that they sung both in the scenes, or dialogue part, and in the chorus also.

musician, so that he could not easily mistake or offend; the actor was not, as on our stage, left at liberty to murder fine sentiment and language by wrong accents and false pronunciation; by hurrying over some parts with precipitancy, and drawling out others into a tedious monotony; a good voice and a tolerable ear were all that the poet required of him.

MUSIC is ranked by Aristotle amongst the essential parts of tragedy; nor is there the least reason to doubt but that it was considered by the antients both as useful and ornamental: it was most probably diffused throughout the whole piece, accompanying the recitation in the dialogue, directing the voice, and even perhaps the * action and gesture of the performers; varying its movements according to the different passions to be excited in the breasts of the audience; its different measures were always carefully † adapted to the metre, and took their names from the different feet made use of in the verse, as the Dactylic, the Ionic, Pœonic, and the rest; the principal exertion of its powers must, we may imagine, have been reserved for the songs or intermedes of the chorus, where both the poetry and music admitted of much greater freedom and variety than in the other parts of the drama: thus we see, in the Antient Theatre, Music always accompanied her sister science, assisted, animated, and supported her; was in short, in all respects, her friend and fellow-labourer,

Qualem decet esse sororem.

* In the third volume of L'Abbé du Boss's Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music; the whole eleventh chapter is employed in proving, or rather endeavouring to prove, that amongst the Romans the theatrical declamation was divided between two actors, one of whom pronounced, whilst the other executed the gesticulation. I refer my readers to the book itself, where they will find many ingenious remarks on the theatrical representations of the antients.

† St. Austin has written a treatise, expressly to reconcile the various measures of antient verse with the principles of music.

The office of a dramatic poet, in the time of antient tragedy, required, we may observe, a wider circle of knowledge, and far more extensive abilities, than the present age demands or expects from him; for, besides all the other requisites, it was necessary that he should be master of every kind of verse, completely skilled in music, and able to direct all the evolutions, movements, or (if so we choose to call them) the dances of the chorus; Euripides, we are told, instructed his singers in the grave and solemn airs, which accompanied all his pieces; and Plutarch informs us, that the people of Susæ, and the Persians, by the command of Alexander, sung the tragedies of Sophocles, and his successors in the drama, according to the measures which those writers had themselves prescribed at the first representation of them.

Tragedy was in it's infancy, what Aristotle calls it, * made up of music and dancing; and the old tragedians, Thespis, Pratinas, Cratinus, and Phrynicus, according to Athenæus, bore the name of † dancers, because they used so much dancing in their chorusses! Tetrameters were therefore for a long time made use of in the verse, as that foot was most proper for motion, though it was afterwards changed to the Iambic; when the dance or ‡ movement was confined to the songs or intermedes of the chorus, which in the more perfect state of tragedy became, as I before observed, but a small part of the whole drama. What instruments the antients made use of in their theatrical

* Ορχηστικωτερα.

† Ορχηστικοι.

‡ This movement was probably (as an excellent critic observes) becoming, graceful and majestic, as appears from the name usually given it, εμμελεια; 'this word (says he) cannot well be translated into our 'language, but expresses all that grace and concinnity of motion which 'the dignity of the choral song required.'

See Notes on the Art of Poetry, v. 1. p. 151.

music, and in what its principal merit consisted, it is perhaps, at this distance of time, not easy to determine: if any of my readers are desirous of prying into a subject so dark and intricate, I must refer them to Plutarch's dialogue on this subject, together with Monsieur Burette's observations on it in the tenth volume of the Hist. de l'Acad.; to which may be added P. Menestrier's Dissertation on Antient and Modern Music, where they will meet with as much information as I believe can be given them on this head.

The use of music in tragedy hath been matter of much doubt and contention with modern critics; M. Dacier thinks it by no means essential, and greatly condemns Aristotle for his approbation of it; it is notwithstanding indisputable, that on the antient stage, music was a most beautiful adjunct to poetry, and contributed in a great measure to the high finishing and perfection of the Greek drama; we cannot perhaps so easily resolve, how far it may be reconcileable to modern manners, though from some late experiments on * one of our theatres, we have reason to think, that, when introduced with propriety, it might be attended with its desired effect.

ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREEK THEATRE.

THE GREEK THEATRE is amongst those superb monuments of antient taste, genius, and magnificence, which would probably have survived the depredations, even of time itself, if ignorance and barbarism had not conspired to ruin and destroy it: of all those noble

* In the representation of Merope, the solemnity of the sacrifice scene is greatly heightened by the music and song; the judicious manager of Drury-lane theatre has introduced it into several other tragedies with success.

and costly structures which Athens and Sparta dedicated to the muses, we have now scarce any thing but a few inconsiderable remains, sufficiently striking to raise our curiosity, but at the same time too mutilated and imperfect to satisfy it. Those writers of antiquity, who have occasionally mentioned the construction of the theatre, as they treated a subject universally known by their contemporaries, did not think themselves obliged to handle it with that degree of accuracy and precision, which were so necessary for the information of posterity; in consequence of which, they frequently gave names to one part of the building that more properly belonged to another, and by a confusion of terms, which could not mislead the readers of their own times, involved their successors in a labyrinth of error and obscurity; add to this, that the same fate hath attended the description of the building, which had before happened to the several constituent parts of the drama; modern critics too often confound together the Greek and Roman theatre (though they differ most essentially in many parts) we find terms frequently appropriated to one, which belong only to the other: and the whole so imperfectly delineated, by almost every one of them, as to render it throughout a matter of doubt and uncertainty. Some lights however have from time to time been thrown on this dark and intricate subject, whose scattered rays, when united and drawn to a point, will exhibit to us the following tolerably accurate, though still imperfect representation of it.

THE ANTIENT GREEK THEATRE, in its highest state of perfection, was a most noble, and magnificent structure, built with the most * solid and durable materials, and capable, we are told, of holding thirty-

* The theatre at Athens was originally built with wood, but being one day remarkably crowded on the exhibition of a tragedy, written by

thousand spectators: to give my readers a proper idea of its form, I shall divide it into three principal departments; one for the actors, which they called the scene; another for the spectators, under the general denomination of the theatre; and a third called the orchestra, allotted to the music, mimes, and dancers. To determine the situation of these three parts, and consequently the disposition of the whole, it is necessary to observe, that the plan (here annexed) consists on one side of two semi-circles, drawn from the same centre, but of different diameters; and on the other, of a square of the same length, but less by one half; the space between the two semi-circles was allotted for the spectators; the square at the end, to the actors; and the intervening area in the middle, to the orchestra. Thus we see, the theatre was circular on one side, and square on the other; round the whole were ranges of porticos (see letters A and B) more or less, according to the number of stories, the most magnificent theatres always having three, one raised above another; to these porticos, which might properly be said to form the body of the edifice, the women were admitted, being the only places covered from rain and heat; the rest were entirely * open above, and all the representations in the † day-time.

Pratinas, the benches fell in, many of the spectators were killed, and the whole fabric buried in ruins: this melancholy accident induced the Athenians, naturally fond of spectacles, to set about the construction of those superb edifices, which they afterwards made use of, built with the most costly marble, and adorned with every thing that could render them solid, noble, splendid, and magnificent.

* The amphitheatres in Spain were formerly built something in this manner, having no roof; so that the spectators were often exposed to rain, heat, and all the inclemency of the seasons.

† In many cities of the two Lombardies (as Riccoboni informs us) the spring of the year is allotted for comedies, which are represented in the day time, without any lights, the playhouses being built in such a manner as to be sufficiently enlightened by the sun: and, in the year

The seats for the spectators (letter I) extended from the upper portico, down quite to the orchestra, (letter H) differing in their width and number with the size of the theatre, and were always so formed, that a line drawn from the top to the bottom, would touch the extremities of every one of them; between each story was a wide passage leading to the seats, every one of which, for the better accommodation of the audience, was at such a distance from the seat placed over it, that the feet of the persons above could not touch those who were below.

The magistrates were separated from the populace by a place appropriated to them called Βελευτικος; the Εφηβικος, or seat of the youths, was assigned to the young men of quality and distinction; there were also some προεδριαι, or first seats, allotted to persons of extraordinary merit, where all those were placed, who had distinguished themselves by any signal services to the commonwealth; such in process of time became hereditary, and were appointed for particular families; all these were very near to, or sometimes in the orchestra, and as close as the structure of the theatre would admit, to the scene, or place of representation.

The orchestra, being between the two parts of the building, one of which was circular, and the other square, partook of the shape of both, varying in its size according to that of the theatre, though its width was always double its length, and that width always the semi-diameter of the whole edifice; to this they entered by passages under the seats of the spectators, the whole being entirely on a * level with the ground;

1609, a regulation was made in France, by the civil magistrate, by which the players were ordered to open their doors at one o'clock, to begin the entertainment at two, and to put an end to it at half an hour after four.

* In the Roman theatre, the senators and chief magistrates frequently sat in the orchestra, where, finding the inconveniency of the level, it was remedied by raising the seats a little above each other.

this led also to the stair-cases; (letter K) by * which they ascended to the different stories of the theatre, some leading to the seats, others to the porticos, of course turned different ways, but all equally wide, disengaged from each other, and so commodious as to give sufficient room for the spectators to go in and out, without the least crowding or inconvenience.

Between the orchestra and the stage was the υποσκηνιον, hyposcenium (letter E) so called, because it was close to the scene or place of representation; here, it is most probable, were placed the instruments that accompanied the actors throughout the drama.

† Beyond this was the large and vacant space called προσκηνιον, proscenium, or λογειον (letter D) representing the scene of action, which was always some public place, as a road, a grove, a court-yard, adjoining to some temple or palace; the length and breadth of this area or stage varied according to the size of the theatre, but was always of the same height, and in the Greek theatre never more or less than ten feet.

At the extremity of the whole building, was the παρασκηνιον, or post-scenium (letter G) that place behind the scenes, where the actors dressed themselves, and

* Monsieur Boindin reckons up very accurately the number of the stair-cases, and of the seats, together with many other minute particulars; what I have extracted from him may suffice to give the reader a general idea of the whole structure; if the curious in architecture are desirous of farther information, I must refer them to the discourse itself, which they will find in the first volume of the Hist. de le Acad. quarto edition, p. 136.

† Between this part and the proscenium, Mr. Boindin places the Greek Θυμελη, or thymele (letter F) so called because in shape it resembled an altar: here, he imagines, the chorus was placed, and performed their songs and dances: but this place, with all due deference to that ingenious critic, could by no means be allotted to the chorus, being much too distant from the stage, where, we know from the tragedies themselves, the chorus must always be, as, besides the songs or intermedes, it bears a part in the dialogue throughout the piece, and consequently must stand close to the other actors.

prepared the habits, scenes, machines, and every thing necessary to the representation.

At the back of the stage (letter L) were the triangular machines for the scenery, called by the Greeks * περιακτοι, which as they turned on their own axis, might be shifted on any occasion, and exhibited three different views or changes of scene; these were not made use of in tragedy, which required but one scene throughout, but most probably at the end of it, to prepare the exhibition of the comedy or mime, which in the antient theatre frequently succeeded each other, perhaps two or three times on the same day.

Amongst the many peculiarities of the Greek theatre, with regard to its construction, there is not perhaps any thing so remarkable, and which we can so difficultly form any idea of, as the echœa, or brazen vessels, which, according to † Vitruvius, were made use of by the Greeks, to render the articulation distinct, and give a more extensive power to the voice, an expedient doubtless extremely necessary in so large a theatre; for this purpose we are told, that they had recourse to se-

* Utrimque aliæ interdum portæ quarum in postibus affixæ machinæ περιακτοι dictæ, quæ pro re ac tempore circumagebantur. Suid. To these Virgil is supposed to allude in the third book of the Georgics:

Vel scena ut versis discedat frontibus ———

Which is thus explained by Servius; 'Scena, (says he) quæ fiebat aut 'versilis aut ductilis; versilis tunc erat cùm subito tota machinis con- 'vertebatur, & aliam picturæ faciem ostendebat; ductilis tunc cum 'tractis tabulatis hàc atque illàc species picturæ nudabatur interior.' What Virgil mentions, was probably an improvement on the περιακτοι, as practised in the Roman theatre.

† Vasa ærea, (says Vetruvius) quæ in cellis sub gradibus mathematica ratione collocantur, ad symphonias musicas, sive concentus, ita componuntur uti vox scenici sonitus conveniens in dispositionibus tactu cum offenderit, aucta cum incremento clarior ac suavior ad spectatorum perveniat aures.

To these echœa it is supposed, Cassiodorus alludes, where he says, 'Tragœdia, concavis repercussionibus roborata, talem sonum videtur 'efficere, ut pæne ab homine non credatur.' Cass. Ep. 51. Lib. 1.

veral round concave plates of brass, placed under the seats of the spectators, so disposed and contrived by the most exact geometrical and harmonic proportions as to reverberate the voice, and carry the words of the actor to the farthest part of the building; the manner in which this was performed is, I must confess, to me utterly incomprehensible; certain it is, that no idea can be formed of it without the most profound knowledge of antient music, and antient architecture: I shall not therefore trouble my readers with an explication of what few, I believe would be able to comprehend; but if any of them are desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with these Brazen Echos, I must refer them to the sixth book of the learned Vitruvius, and Monsieur Burette's Treatise on Antient Music.

ON THE SCENES, MACHINES, AND DECORATIONS.

THOUGH we have no genuine or regular account now extant of the machines and decorations of the Greek theatre, we have sufficient reason to conclude from the tragedies themselves still remaining, that such things were made use of in the representation; as we find in almost every one of them gods ascending and descending, ghosts and furies frequently appearing on the stage, with divinities, celestial and terrestrial; for all these, we need not doubt but that the antients had machines of various kinds, according to the various exigencies and circumstances that required them; and, as we learn from the scattered remains of Hesychius, Pollux, and other writers, were no strangers to * trap-doors, flying chariots, magnificent arches, flights, ropes, pullies, and in short all the mechanical apparatus of the

* Scenæ tragicæ (says Vitruvius) deformantur columnis, fastigiis, & signis, reliquisque regalibus rebus.

stage. As to the scenery, we know that the strict regard paid by the Greek tragedians to the unity of place confined the whole represensation of their pieces to one particular spot; this however we find was sumptuously adorned with all the embellishments, which art or nature could furnish; magnificent * columns, porticos, statues, paintings, basso-relievos, every thing, which the elegant taste and genius of Greece could produce, was added to enrich the scene; even so early as in the time of Æschylus, we are † told that the decorations of the theatre were made according to the exact rules of perspective. The whole theatre (porticos excepted) being, as I before observed, uncovered, and consequently exposed to the heat of the sun, and inclemency of the weather; a kind of thin curtain, fastened probably to a large pillar or pole in the centre of the building, was extended over the whole: as the heat notwithstanding (which is always the case in our modern tents) frequently penetrated through them, and the breaths of so numerous an assembly must have been offensive, they had recourse to artificial showers of rain, which they conveyed from the top of the porticos through the statues that were dispersed over the different parts of the building; ‡ Mr. Boin-

* Ἀναπεισματα, sunt rudentes scenici quibus per tractoria organa latentes personæ sustollebantur in scenam. Ἐωρημα, rudentes qui ex alto suspensi sunt ut sustineant eos qui ære ferri videntur. POLLUX.

† Tum Athenis, Agatarchus, Æschylo docente, tragediam primus scenam fecit, & de eo commentarium reliquit, ex quo moniti Democritus & Anaxagoras de eadem re scripserunt, quemadmodum oporteat ad aciem oculorum, radiorumque extensionem, centro constituto ad lineas ratione naturali respondere; uti de re incertâ certæ imagines ædificiorum in scenarum picturis redderent speciem, & quæ in directis planisque frontibus sint figurata, alia absidentia, alia prominentia esse videantur. VITRUVIUS, lib. viii.

‡ As I do not remember that we have any authority from antient Greek writers for this anecdote, I should rather be inclined to consider the perfumed water as a refinement of modern luxury, and ascribe it to the improvements of the Roman theatre.

din adds, that the water on these occasions was always scented, so that the spectators were not only refreshed by this gentle dew falling upon them, but at the same time regaled with the most exquisite perfume.

ON THE MASKS.

It appears from the united testimonies of several antient writers, that the actors of Greece never appeared on the stage in tragedy, or any other species of the drama, without masks: it is most probable, that before the time of Æschylus, to whom * Horace ascribes this invention, they disguised their features, either, as in the days of Thespis, by daubing them with the lees of wine, or by painting, false hair, and other artifices of the same kind with those which are practised in the modern theatre: masks however were soon introduced, and looked on, we may imagine, in those days as a most ingenious device; that, which they made use of in tragedy, was, according to the best information we can gather concerning it, a kind of casque or helmet, which covered the whole head, representing not only the face, but the beard, hair, ears, and even in the women's masks, all the ornaments of the coif, or cap, being made of † different materials, according to

* Suidas and Athenæus attribute the invention of masks to the poet Chœrilus. Horace gives the honour to Æschylus; but Aristotle, who we may suppose was as well acquainted with this matter as any of them, fairly acknowledges himself entirely ignorant of it. 'Τις δε πρωτος, (says he) απεδωκε, ηγνοηται.'

† The first masks were made of the leaves of a plant, to which the Greeks on this account gave the name of προσωπιον, 'quidam (says Pliny) Arcion personatam vocant, cujus folio nullum est latius.' Virgil mentions them as composed of the barks of trees:

Oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cavatis;

And Pollux tells us, that they were made of leather, lined with cloth or stuff, ενδοτεν δ' οσθιον, εξωτεν δε σκυτινιον προσωπον.

the several improvements, which it received from time to time; the most perfect and durable were of wood, executed with the greatest care, by sculptors of the first rank and eminence, who received their directions from the poet. It seems to have been an established opinion amongst the antients, that their heroes and demi-gods, who were generally the subject of their tragedies, were of an extraordinary size, far surpassing that of common mortals; we must not be surprised therefore to find their tragic poets, in compliance with this popular prejudice, raising them upon * the cothurnus, swelling them to an immense magnitude, and by the assistance of a † large and frightful mask, endeavouring to fill the minds of the spectators with a religious awe, and veneration of them: the tragic masks were generally copied from the busts or statues of the principal personages, and consequently conveyed the most exact idea and resemblance of them, which must have given an air of probability to the whole: those, which represented ‡ ghosts and furies, were made still more terrible and frightful; but the

* The cothurnus, or buskin, was a kind of large and high shoe, the sole of which, being made of very thick wood, raised the actors to an extraordinary size; Juvenal tells us, that it made them appear extremely tall, and compares an actress without her cothurnus to a pigmy.

——— breviorque videtur
Virgine pygmeæ nullis adjuta cothurnis.

The cothurnus was probably of the same form as the high-shoe, or piece of cork, bound about with tin or silver, worn by the Spanish women, called a chioppine, and which, it should seem by a passage in Shakespear, was used on our own stage. 'Your ladyship is nearer 'heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chioppine.' HAMLET, Act 2, Scene 7.

† The tragic masks had large and expanded mouths, as if (says the humorous Lucian) they were about to devour the spectators, ὡς καταπιομένος τὴς θεατὰς.

‡ The mask commonly used, was called simply προσωπειον; the others, μεσημολυκειον, and γοργονειον.

masks of the * dancers, or persons, who formed the body of the chorus, had nothing disagreeable.

As in the infancy of tragedy there were probably but few actors, the use of masks gave each of them an opportunity of playing several parts, wherein the character, age, and sex were different, without being discovered; the large opening of the mouth was so contrived as to increase the sound of the voice, and send it to the farthest part of the theatre, which was so extremely large and spacious, that without some such assistance we cannot easily conceive how the actor could be well heard or seen; in all theatrical painting, scenery, and decoration, the objects, we know, must be magnified beyond the life and reality, to produce their proper effect; and, in the same manner, we may imagine, that, in so extensive an area as the Greek theatre, it might be necessary to exaggerate the features, and enlarge the form of the actor; add to this, that at such a distance as most of the spectators were, the natural expression of the eyes and countenance must be entirely lost. The sanguine admirers of every thing that is antient bring many more arguments to defend the tragic † mask; but after all that can be said in its favour, it is perhaps scarce defensible; the face is certainly the best index of the mind, and the passions are as forcibly expressed by the features, as by the words and gesture of the performer: the Greeks in this, as

* 'Τȣ δε ορχηςȣ σχημα (says Lucian) κοσμιον και ευπρεπες. Το δε προσω-'πον αυτο καλλιςον, τῳ υποκειμενῳ δραματι εοικος, ȣ κεοχηνος αλλα συμμεμυκος.'

† Masks have had their admirers in modern as well as in antient times, and been used on more stages than that of Greece: even towards the middle of the last century, the actors both in tragedy and comedy on the French theatre wore masks. The English is doubtless in this respect, as well as in many others, infinitely superior to the Athenian stage; notwithstanding which, I will promise to join the προσωποφιλοι, and vote for the restoration of the antient mask, whenever they will shew me one that can represent the happy features of Quin, in the character of Falstaff, or give us an idea of a frantic Lear, like the look and face of the inimitable Garrick.

in many other particulars, sacrificed propriety, truth, and reason, to magnificence and vanity.

All the expences of the theatre were defrayed by the state, and were indeed so considerable, that nothing but the purse of an opulent republic could possibly have supported them, as it is confidently affirmed by * historians that Athens spent more in dramatic representations than in all her wars.

OF THE TIME WHEN TRAGEDY FLOURISHED IN GREECE.

It was not my design, in this short Dissertation (nor could indeed be comprehended within the limits of it) to point out, with *Aristotle*, what tragedy ought to be; but simply to shew what it was during the lives of the great triumvirate, as far as we can judge from the remains now extant: in my account of its several parts therefore, I have followed the steps of the great critic, but principally confined myself to those particulars, which distinguish the antient from the modern drama, and which may best enable us to form a proper and adequate idea of the Greek tragedy; but even the most perfect knowledge of all the essential and constituent parts will be found insufficient for this purpose, unless we take into our view also the time when, and the very spot where, every piece was exhibited. Dramatic, as well as every other species of poetry, is best known and distinguished by the place of its birth; it will take its form, colour, and complection from its native soil, as naturally as water derives its taste and qua-

* This assertion, which seems rather rather hyperbolical, is, notwithstanding supported by the grave Plutarch, who, speaking of the Athenians, assures us, that the representation of the Bacchanals, Phœnissæ, Œdipus, Antigone, Medea, and Electra, cost them more money than the defence of their own liberties in the field, or all their contests with the Barbarians.

lities from the different kinds of earth, through which it flows: it is absolutely necessary, therefore, before we can judge impartially of the Greek tragedies, to transport ourselves to the scene where they were represented, to shake off the Englishman for a time, and put on the Athenian.

It has been with great truth remarked, that there is allotted to every nation upon earth a particular period, which may be called their zenith of perfection, to which they approach by slow degrees, and from which, they gradually and insensibly recede: in this happy age of power and prosperity, the arts and sciences, taste, genius, and literature have always shone with distinguished lustre; such was the time when Athens gave laws to all Greece, whilst the glorious victories of Marathon and Salamis animated every tongue with eloquence, and filled every breast with exultation; that haughty and successful people maintained, for a long time, her sovereignty over the neighbouring nations; her councils were influenced by prudence, and her battles crowned with conquest; the treasure which she had seized in the temple of Delphos, enabled her not only to carry on her wars with success, but left her a plentiful reserve also to supply her luxuries: this was the age of heroes, philosophers, and poets; when architecture, painting, and sculpture, fostered by the genial warmth of power and protection, so conspicuously displayed their several beauties, and produced all those superb monuments of antient taste and genius, which united to distinguish this illustrious æra: during this happy period, tragedy appeared in her meridian splendor, when the great triumvirate exhibited before the most polite and refined nation then upon earth those excellent pieces, which extorted applause, honours, and rewards, from their contemporaries, and ensured to them the deserved admiration of all posterity: it may, indeed, with great truth, be asserted, that the

same remarkable love of order and simplicity, the same justness of symmetry and proportion, the same elegance, truth, and sublimity, which appeared in the buildings, pictures, and statues of that age, are conspicuous also in the antient drama.

In the time of the Greek tragedy, the Athenians dictated, as it were, to all mankind: proud by nature, and elated by riches and prosperity, they looked down with the utmost contempt on the neighbouring nations, whom they styled and treated as barbarians; as a republic, the avowed enemies of monarchy and dependence; as a free people, bold and impatient of restraint or contradiction; strongly attached to their own laws and customs; lively and active, but inconstant and superstitious: their manners plain and simple, but their taste at the same time elegant and refined. As the theatre was supported entirely at the expence of the public, the public directed all its operations; we might naturally expect, therefore, that the poet would, for his own sake, take care to adapt his compositions to the public taste; to fall in with national prejudices and superstitions; to soothe the pride, flatter the self-love, and adopt the opinions of his fellow-citizens: we must not wonder to hear, as we constantly do, (in the tragedies that remain) the praises of Athens perpetually resounded, the superiority of her laws and constitution extolled, and her form of government preferred to every other; oblique hints, or direct accusations of folly and weakness in her enemies; public facts frequently alluded to, and public events recorded; their own festivals, sacrifices, * religious rites and ceremonies, carefully and accurately described; Sparta and Thebes, as rival states, occasionally satyrized and

* See, amongst many other instances, the noble description of the Pythian games, in the second act of Electra, p. 92 of my translation of Sophocles, and the sacred grove of the Eumenides, in the Œdipus Coloneus, p. 405.

condemned; and above all, every opportunity taken to point out the evils of monarchy, and engrave their favourite democratical principles on the hearts of the people: it is not improbable but that many of those moral sentences, and political apophthegms, which at this distance of time appear cold and insipid to us, had, besides their general tendency, some double meaning, some alluusion to particular facts and circumstances, which gave them an additional lustre: without this key to the Greek theatre, it is impossible to form a right idea of antient tragedy; which was not, like our own, mere matter of amusement, but the channel of public instruction, and the instrument of public policy; those readers, therefore, who are utterly unacquainted with the religion, laws, and customs of Athens, are by no means adequate judges of it; they only * condemn, for the most part, what they do not understand, and rashly judge of the whole edifice, whilst they view but an inconsiderable part of the building. But so warmly are we attached to what lies before us, and so prejudiced in favour of those modes and customs, which are established amongst ourselves, that we generally rate the merit of past performances by the standard and rule of present practice; the antients, therefore, are subject to the disadvantage of being tried, not, as justice demands, by their laws, but by our own.

And here it is worthy of our observation to remark, that the Greek tragedy seems, in its whole progress, to have kept pace with the place of its birth, and to have flourished and declined with its native country: the rise of Athens, from meanness and obscurity to power and splendor, may be dated from the battle of Marathon, which laid the foundation of all her future glory; soon after which we find Æschylus forming his plan of

* Damnant quod non intelligunt. QUINTILIAN.

antient tragedy; after him arose the immortal Sophocles, who improved upon, and greatly exceeded his illustrious master; to these succeeded Euripides, born ten years after the battle of Marathon, and on the very day of the sea-fight at Salamis: whilst these illustrious writers flourished, Athens flourished also, for above half a century: Euripides was fifty years of age, when the Peloponnesian war began; from which period the superiority of Athens visibly declined, and was soon entirely destroyed by the rival power of Sparta, in confederacy with the Persian monarch. Sophocles, happy in not surviving the honour and liberty of his country, expired one year before the taking of Athens, by Lysander, when the sovereignty of Greece devolved to the Lacedæmonians.

ON THE THREE GREAT TRAGEDIANS.

Æschylus was born at Athens, in the first year of the * sixtieth olympiad: he embraced very early in life the profession of † arms, and distinguished himself as an officer at the famous battles of Marathon, Salamis, and Platæa: the perpetual scenes of slaughter and bloodshed, in which he was during a long series of years unavoidably engaged, seem to have tinged his imagination with that portion of the fierce and terrible so distinguishable in all his pieces: during the intervals of his military occupation, he found time to write no less than seventy, or according to some historians, ninety tragedies, only seven of which are now extant: when he was pretty far advanced in years, he lost the poetical prize to Sophocles, then but a boy,

* Five hundred and forty years before Christ.

† He had two brothers, who were likewise in the army, Cynegirus and Aminias: at the battle of Salamis, the former lost his life, the latter one of his arms.

or, as other writers with more probability assert, to Simonides, in an elegy on the heroes who fell at Marathon; a circumstance, which so deeply affected him, that he immediately withdrew from Athens, and retired to the court of Hiero, king of Sicily, a friend of the Muses, whose palace was a kind of asylum for the discontented poets of Greece; there, we are told, he lived in great affluence and splendor, to the age of sixty-five; the writers of his life, not willing to admit that so great a poet could die a common death, have thought proper to dignify his last moments with a circumstance, which carries with it more of the marvellous than the probable: an oracle had, it seems, declared (for oracles were always ready on these occasions) that Æschylus should by the hand of heaven; accordingly, that this might be fulfilled, it is reported, that an eagle was seen in the air, holding in her talons a tortoise, which (unfortunately for the bard) she let go, and dropping on the head of Æschylus, who happened to be walking beneath, fractured his skull: he is said to have gained thirteen victories over his rival poets, which one would think was an ample recompence for the single failure that gave him so much uneasiness. His tragedies were greatly admired during his life, and after his death held in the highest esteem, insomuch that a decree was passed by the senate, declaring, that if any person would exhibit the tragedies of Æschylus, the state would bear the charges of the chorus, and defray the whole expence of the representation; an honour, which probably had not been bestowed on any poet before his time, though afterwards, as I observed above, they were generally played at public cost.

Æschylus is a bold, nervous, animated writer: his imagination fertile, but licentious; his judgement true, but ungoverned; his genius lively, but uncultivated; his sentiments noble and sublime, but at the same

time wild, irregular, and frequently fantastic; his plots, for the most part, rude and inartificial; his scenes unconnected, and ill-placed; his language generally poignant and expressive, though in many places turgid and obscure, and even too often degenerating into fustian and bombast; his characters strongly marked, but all partaking of that wild fierceness, which is the characteristic of their author; his peculiar excellency was in raising terror and astonishment, in warm and descriptive scenes of war and slaughter: if we consider the state of the drama when he undertook to reform and improve it, we shall behold him with admiration; if we compare him with his two illustrious successors, he hides his diminished head, and appears far less conspicuous: were we to draw a parallel between dramatic poetry and painting, we should perhaps style him the Julio Romano of antient tragedy.

Sophocles was born at Colonè, a burgh or village in Attica; his father Sophilus was, as some writers tell us, a * blacksmith; or, according to a more favourable heraldry, master of a forge: as the profession of arms was at that time more honourable, and probably more advantageous than any other, Sophocles entered into it, and followed the steps of his master Æschylus, both as a soldier and a poet; in the former capacity he had the honour to serve under the great † Pericles. As a dramatic writer, he was early distinguished for his extraordinary abilities, which first placed him on a level, and afterwards raised him to a

* Much ink has been shed by the commentators on this subject, both with regard to Sophocles and Demosthenes also, who was, it seems, in the same predicament, it not being determined whether his father was a Vulcan or a common Cyclop.

† Pericles, if we may believe Athenæus, used to say, that Sophocles was a good soldier, but a bad officer; a circumstance, which, if he had not succeeded better as a poet, it is probable would never have reached posterity.

superiority over his illustrious rival; he is supposed to have written one hundred and twenty tragedies, only seven of which are now remaining; these were received by his contemporaries with the applause they so highly deserved; it is remarked, that he never acted himself in any of his plays, as Æschylus and Euripides did, his voice being too weak and low for the stage; though he was always present at the representation, and received the applause of the audience, who, we are told, seldom failed to signify their approbation by a loud and general clap, both at his entrance into, and leaving the theatre: he was crowned twenty times, and though he probably sometimes shared the fate of his brother poets by unjust censure, could never be prevailed on, as his rivals were, to leave his native country, to which he took * every opportunity of shewing his sincere attachment: with regard to his death, historians (if scholiasts and commentators may be so called) have indulged themselves in the same liberty which they took with his predecessor Æschylus; some kill him with a grape-stone; others tell us, that he died with joy at being crowned for one of his tragedies; whilst a third set gravely assure us, that having one day an inclination to play a part in his own Antigone, he dipped into a speech too long for his weak lungs, and expired, merely for want of a better breath, in the midst of it.

After all, as Sophocles, according to various testimonies, lived till ninety, it is not improbable that he might have died of † extreme old age, a distemper

* It is with great reason imagined, that Sophocles laid the scene of his latter Œdipus in Colonè, with a proposed design of doing honour to the place of his nativity.

† The story of his sons ingratitude, told by Plutarch and others, is omitted here, because my readers will find it related in my notes on the translation of the Œdipus Coloneus. See p. 403.

Sophocles had several children, one of which, whose name was Iophon, is said to have inherited the dramatic genius of his father, and

which is seldom perhaps more favourable to poets than to other men: the Athenians erected a sumptuous monument in memory of him, on which was engraved a swarm of * bees, in allusion to the name generally given him on account of his verses, which are indeed, wonderfully soft and harmonious, or, as a nobler poet even than Sophocles himself expresses it, sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb.

Sophocles may with great truth be called the prince of antient dramatic poets; his fables, at least of all those tragedies now extant, are interesting and well-chosen, his plots regular and well-conducted, his sentiments elegant, noble, and sublime, his incidents natural, his diction simple, his manners and characters striking, equal and unexceptionable, his chorusses well adapted to the subject, his moral reflections pertinent and useful, and his numbers in every part to the last degree sweet and harmonious; the warmth of his imagination is so tempered by the perfection of his judgement, that his spirit, however animated, never wanders into licentiousness, whilst at the same time the fire of his genius seldom suffers the most uninteresting parts of his tragedy to sink into coldness and insipidity; his peculiar excellence seems to lie in the † descriptive; and, exclusive of his dramatic powers, he is certainly a greater poet than either of his illustrious rivals: were I to draw a similitude of him, as I did of Æschylus, from painting, I should say that his ordonnance was so

to have written four tragedies, the names only of which are come down to us, viz. Ilium, Achilles, Telephus, and Actæon.

† Sophocles was universally styled the Bee. Some commentators have taken the bees from off his tomb, and hived them in his cradle; assuring us, that when Sophocles was an infant, a swarm of them was seen to alight upon his lips, which was at that time looked on as a presage of his future eloquence.

* For a proof of this, I would refer my readers to his fine description of the Pythian games in the Electra; the distress of Philoctetes in Lemnos; and the praises of Athens in the Œdipus Coloneus.

just, his figures so well grouped and contrasted, his colours so glowing and natural, all his pieces in short executed in so bold and masterly a style, as to wrest the palm from every other hand, and point him out as the Raphael of the antient drama.

EURIPIDES, the son of Mnesarchus and Clito, was a native of Salamis, to which place his parents had withdrawn to shelter themselves from the storm of war with which Greece was threatened by the invasion of Xerxes*; he was born in the second year of the seventy-fifth olympiad, in the midst of all the triumphal pomp, which followed the famous victories of Salamis and Platæa. As the genius of Euripides was not turned like that of his two predecessors, towards a military life, he attached himself to philosophy, at that time the fashionable taste and study of all Greece, under the celebrated † Anaxagoras; but partly perhaps from the fear of incurring his master's fate, and partly from the natural bent of his own mind, soon left the perplexing paths of science, and gave himself up to the more inviting charms of poetry. As the stage was probably then, as it is now, far the most lucrative branch of it, he applied himself early to the writing of tragedies, in which he succeeded so well, as to enter the lists with Æschylus and Sophocles: the immortal Socrates, to whom we may suppose he was in a great measure indebted for the applause and encouragement bestowed on him, not only honoured him with his patronage and protection, but entered into the most in-

* Four hundred and seventy-five years before Christ.

† Anaxagoras, amongst many other new opinions advanced by him, had asserted, that the sun was a globe of fire; which gave so much offence to the ignorance and superstition of his countrymen, that he was forced to submit to a voluntary exile, as the only means of saving his life, which would otherwise have fallen a sacrifice to the enraged multitude.

timate friendship and connection with him; he is even said to have assisted him in several of his plays; the moral and philosophic air, which runs through them all, seems indeed greatly to favour this opinion, which was industriously propagated by his * enemies, to obscure, if possible, the lustre of such conspicuous merit; he gained † five victories, and is supposed to have written seventy-five tragedies, only nineteen of which are now extant; some ‡ letters of Euripides, handed down to us, take notice of a quarrel between him and Sophocles, and give an account also of their perfect reconciliation; though his tragedies were for the most part well received by his cotemporaries, we may imagine that, like other poets, he met with some ill treatment from them, as we find him in the latter part of his life at the court of Archelaus, king of Macedon, who loaded him with favours, and treated him with all the respect due to his character and abilities; there, we are told, he lived in great affluence and splendor about three years, when unfortunately wandering one day into a solitary place, he was set on by a pack of hounds, and § torn to pieces, at the age of seventy-five. Aulus Gellius informs us, that the Athenians sent to Macedon for his body, and had pre-

* Diogenes Laertius, speaking of Socrates, says, ἐδοκει συγγραφειν Ευριπιδη. Mnesilochus told the Athenians, that Euripides was only a hammer-man to Socrates, and calls him Ευριπιδης Σωκρατογλαφευς; the comic poets frequently reproach him for his obligations to the philosopher.

† Some commentators correct the text of A. Gellius, and make it fifteen.

‡ The English reader may find these letters at the end of my translation of the Epistles of Phalaris, published in 1749.

§ One of his biographers acquaints us, that the dogs were planted there on purpose, and set on by a brother bard, grown jealous of his rising reputation, who took this opportunity to dispatch him; whether there be any truth in the whole story is extremely disputable; the author however might very well expect to gain credit for it, as it has been customary, time out of mind, and continues so to this day, for rival poets to tear one another to pieces.

pared to grace it with a pompous and splendid funeral, but the Macedonians refusing to deliver it, they contented themselves with erecting a magnificent tomb to his memory, and graving his name and honours on the empty marble; a copy of his works was carefully deposited amongst the archives, and so highly esteemed, that a king of Egypt in vain for a long time solicited a copy them, which the Athenians positively refused, till a famine happening in Greece, the king in return refused to sell them corn; necessity at last prevailing, they parted with the manuscript, and the king acknowledged so singular a favour, by permitting the merchants of Athens to take away as much corn as they wanted, without paying the usual tribute.

In such high esteem were the works of this poet, that many noble Athenians being taken prisoners at * Syracuse, the unfortunate captives were all put to death, except those who could repeat any passages from the plays of Euripides; these men, and these alone, they pardoned, caressed, treated with the utmost respect, and afterwards set them at liberty.

Euripides, fortunately for his own character, as well as for posterity, is come down to us more perfect and entire than either of his cotemporaries; his merit therefore is more easily ascertained; his fables are generally interesting, his plots frequently irregular and artificial, his characters sometimes unequal, but for the most part striking and well contrasted, his sentiments remarkably fine, just, and proper, his diction soft, elegant, and persuasive; he abounds much more in moral apophthegms and reflections than Æschylus or Sophocles, which, as they are not always introduced with propriety, give some of his tragedies a stiff and

* This story is told at large, in a small and elegant tract lately published, entitled an Essay on the Influence of Philosophy upon the fine Arts, p. 21.

scholastic appearance, with which the severer critics have not failed to reproach him: it it most probable however, that in this he complied with the taste of his age, and in obedience to the dictates of his friend and master Socrates, who, we may suppose, thought it no disgrace to this favourite poet, to deviate from the rigid rules of the drama, in order to render it more subservient to the noble purposes of piety and virtue; there is, besides, in this dialogue, a didactic and argumentative turn, which favours strongly of the Socratic disputant, and which probably procured him the name of the * philosopher of the theatre.

It is said of Sophocles, that he painted men as they ought to be; of Euripides, that he painted them as they were; a quaint remark, which I shall leave the critics to comment and explain, only observing, that the latter is much more familiar than the former, descends much lower into private life, and consequently lets down, in some measure, the dignity of the buskin, which in Sophocles is always carefully supported: there are some scenes in Euripides where the ideas are so coarse, and the expression so low and vulgar, as, if translated with the utmost caution, would perhaps greatly shock the delicacy and refinement of modern manners; the feeling reader, notwithstanding, will be amply recompensed by that large portion of the tender and pathetic, the peculiar excellency of this poet, which is diffused throughout his works; his chorusses are remarkably beautiful and poetical: they do not, indeed, as Aristotle has observed, always naturally arise from and correspond with the incidents of the drama; this fault, however, they generally make amends for by the harmony of their numbers, and the many fine moral and religious sentiments which they contain.

* ὁ φιλοσοφος της σκηνης.

Upon the whole, though Euripides had not perhaps so sublime a genius as Æschylus, or a judgment so perfect as Sophocles, he seems to have written more to the heart than either of them; and if I were to place him with the other two in the school of painters, I should be inclined, from the softness of his pencil, to call him the Corregio of the antient drama.

From the works of these three illustrious writers and from them * alone we must draw all our knowledge of the antient Greek tragedy, which, in the view we have here taken of it, appears to be full, complete, and perfect, and has been miserably disjointed and torn to pieces by the moderns: from the ruins of this noble edifice have arisen two very imperfect structures, the opera and tragedy of later times, both greatly though not equally defective, the former, confining itself merely to the eye and ear, makes but a slight impression on the mind, whilst the latter, from its omission of the chorus, music, scenery, and decoration, fall short of that beauty and perfection, which is only to be found in the antient drama; we must at the same time fairly acknowledge that our manners and customs, our opinions, views, taste, and judgment, are so different from those of Greece, that her drama is by no means in every respect a proper model and standard for modern poets, and must, after all we can advance in its favour, always remain among those reproachful monuments of the purity and simplicity of former ages, which we cannot imitate though we are forced to admire.

* Of all the Greek tragedies produced by various writers, and which are almost innumerable, we have only thirty-three now remaining, though, according to the generally received account, no less than two hundred and sixty, or upwards, were written only by the three great tragedians; all the rest, except a few inconsiderable fragments, fell a sacrifice to barbarity, and are buried in oblivion.

It must be at the same time confessed, that antient tragedy hath its share with every thing else of human imperfection: too strict an attention to the unities hath fettered and confined it; many of its beauties are merely local and temporal; the plots are frequently uninteresting and ill-conducted, the speeches either too long or too short, the expressions sometimes coarse and indelicate; in the general management and representation of the whole, too much is sacrificed to popular prejudice, superstition, and vanity, the ruling passions of an Athenian audience: too strong an attachment to the laws, customs, and form of government then prevailing, threw a dull air of uniformity over the drama; the same story, the same characters and sentiments, even the same expressions too often occur in different tragedies; that simplicity, which so distinguished the manners of the antients, had naturally its influence over their taste also; they selected one plain but noble object, and all the variety, which their dramatic poets aimed at, or which the spectators required of them, was to place that in different lights, without suffering any other to intercept the prospect of it; they admitted no episodes, under-plots, or any of those extraneous incidental ornaments, which make up modern performances, * and confined themselves principally to the faults and imperfections of the great, as Milton observes of them,

'High actions, and high passions best describing.'

But because their taste was more correct and severe, it doth by no means follow, that it was less true and perfect than our own: the moderns heap incident on

* One of the greatest advantages of modern tragedy over the antient is perhaps its judicious descent from the adventures of demi-gods, kings, and heroes, into the humbler walk of private life, which is much more interesting to the generality of mankind.

incident, sentiment on sentiment, and character on character; a change, which is perhaps rather to be attributed to the corruption of our taste than to the improvement of it: it is always a mark of a vitiated stomach, when wholesome and natural food is rejected with disgust, and provocatives used to raise the appetite; in the same manner, I cannot but be of opinion, that our impatient thirst after what critics affect to call business is nothing but the result of false taste, and depraved judgment: because antient tragedy is not crowded with a heap of unnatural episodes, stuffed with similies, metaphors, imagery, and poetical flowers, the moderns treat it with contempt, and find nothing in it but a poverty of sentiment, a want of order and connection in the scenes, a flatness and insipidity in the dialogue, a coarseness and indelicacy in the expression; but even if we should grant the truth of every objection, there would still remain, to compensate for all these real or seeming imperfections a variety of true and striking beauties: in antient tragedy, and there only, we shall find a most exact and faithful picture of the manners of Greece, its religious and civil policy, sublimity both of sentiment and diction, regularity, symmetry, and proportion, excellent moral aphorisms and reflections, together with a most elegant and amiable simplicity diffused through every page.

In a word, to affirm, as many who have more learning than judgment sometimes will, that there are no good tragedies but the antient, is the affectation of scholastic pedantry; to deny them their deserved applause, and treat them with ridicule and contempt, is, on the other hand, the effect of modern pride, ignorance, and petulancy: upon the whole, French, Italian, Spanish, and German critics, may, perhaps, find some excuse for their severe animadversions on the antient Greek tragedy; it may exercise their envy,

and find employment for their spleen and ill-nature, as they have nothing of their own to put in competition with it; but Englishmen should be above such envy, and such malevolence, because they can boast a dramatic writer, superior to all that antiquity ever produced: we may safely join with the most sanguine partisans of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, in the sincerest admiration of their several excellencies, and rejoice within ourselves to see them all united and surpassed in the immortal and inimitable Shakespear.

PROMETHEUS CHAIN'D.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

STRENGTH AND FORCE.

VULCAN.

PROMETHEUS.

OCEANUS.

IO.

MERCURY.

CHORUS.

NYMPHS OF THE OCEAN.

PROMETHEUS CHAIN'D.

ÆSCHYLUS wrote three Tragedies on the story of Prometheus: the first exhibited him as carrying the sacred gift of fire to men; the second as chained to Caucasus; the third as delivered from his chains. Of these the second only remains to us. The short account which Prometheus gives in this of the barbarous state of man before he taught them the civilizing arts, makes us regret the loss of the first; and we have good reason to imagine that the portrait of Hercules in the third, delineated by this great master, must have been inimitable. There is in this remaining drama a sublimity of conception, a strength, a fire, a certain savage dignity peculiar to this bold writer. The scenery is the greatest that the human imagination ever formed: the wild and desolate rock frowning over the sea, the stern and imperious sons of Pallas and Styx holding up Prometheus to its rifted side whilst Vulcan fixes his chains, the Nymphs of the Ocean flying to its summit to commiserate his

unhappy state, old Oceanus on his hippogriff, the appearance of Iö, the descent of Mercury, the whirlwind tearing up the sands, swelling the boisterous sea, and dashing its waves to the stars, the vollied thunders rolling all their fiery rage against the rock, and the figure of Prometheus unappalled at this terrible storm, and bidding defiance to Jupiter, would require the utmost effort of Salvator Rosa's genius to represent them. Yet is the horrid greatness of this drama tempered with much tenderness; the reluctance of Vulcan to execute the severe commands of Jupiter is finely contrasted to the eager, unfeeling insolence of Strength and Force; the character of Iö is mournfully gentle; and the Oceanitidæ are of a most amiable mildness joined to a firm but modest prudence; even the untameable ferocity of Prometheus discovers under it a benevolence that interests us deeply in his sufferings.

PROMETHEUS CHAIN'D.

STRENGTH, FORCE, VULCAN, PROMETHEUS (1).

STRENGTH.

AT length then to the wide earth's extreme bounds,
To Scythia are we come, those pathless wilds
Where human footstep never mark'd the ground.
Now, Vulcan, to thy task; at Jove's command

(1) According to the theogony of Hesiod, Chaos was the ancestor of Nature; next to him was Gaia: her progeny by Ouranus was numerous, amongst these were Oceanus and Japetus: by Clymene, daughter of Oceanus, Japetus was the father of Prometheus, with whose history the Athenians were well acquainted from the narrative of Hesiod, which was, we may suppose, the popular creed of the times in which our poet wrote. The English reader is by this time as well acquainted with this strange story.

STRENGTH AND FORCE.

These two allegorical personages were of high antiquity and illustrious birth, the sons of Pallas and Styx. Cœus, the son of Ouranus and Gaia, was the father of Pallas by Eurybia, daughter of Pontus and Gaia: Styx was the daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. When Jupiter assembled the gods on Olympus, and declared his gracious intention to reward and honour each that should be auxiliary to him in his wars against the Titans, Styx, by the advice of her father, was the first that attended him, leading with her these her two sons; Jupiter received her with great respect, appointed her to be the sacred oath of the gods, and admitted her sons to be constant attendants on his own person. Hesiod. Theog. v. 400.

Fix to these high-projecting rocks this vain
Artificer of man; each massy link
Draw close, and bind his adamantine chains.
Thy radiant pride, the fiery flame, that lends
Its aid to ev'ry art, he stole, and bore
The gift to mortals; for which bold offence
The gods assign him this just punishment;
That he may learn to reverence the pow'r
Of Jove, and moderate his love to man.

VULCAN.

Stern pow'rs, your harsh commands have here an end,
Nor find resistance. My less hardy mind,
Averse to violence, shrinks back, and dreads
To bind a kindred god to this wild cliff,
Expos'd to ev'ry storm: but strong constraint
Compels me; I must steel my soul, and dare:
Jove's high commands require a prompt observance.
High-thoughted son of truth-directing Themis (2),
Thee with indissoluble chains, perforce,
Must I now rivet to this savage rock,
Where neither human voice, nor human form,
Shall meet thine eye, but parching in the beams,
Unshelter'd, of yon fervid sun, thy bloom
Shall lose its grace, and make thee wish th' approach
Of grateful evening mild, whose dusky stole
Spangled with gems shall veil his fiery heat;
And night upon the whitening ground breathe frore,
But soon to melt, touch'd by his orient ray.
So shall some present ill with varied pain

(2) Themis was one of the most ancient and respectable deities, the daughter of Ouranus and Gaia, that is of Heaven and Earth. As she was the second prophetic power that held her oracular seat at Delphos, she was honoured as the goddess of Truth and Justice.

Afflict thee; nor is he yet born, whose hand
Shall set thee free: thus thy humanity
Receives its meed, that thou, a god, regardless
Of the gods' anger, honouredst mortal man
With courtesies, which justice not approves.
Therefore the joyless station of this rock
Unsleeping, unreclining, shalt thou keep,
And many' a groan, many' a loud lament
Throw out in vain, nor move the rig'rous breast
Of Jove, relentless in his youthful pow'r.

STRENGTH.

No more: why these delays, this foolish pity?
Dost thou not hate a god by gods abhorr'd,
That prostitutes thy radiant boast to man?

VULCAN.

Strong are the ties of kindred and long converse.

STRENGTH.

Well: but to disobey thy sire's commands,
Darest thou do that? Is not that fear more strong?

VULCAN.

Soft pity never touch'd thy ruthless mind.

STRENGTH.

Will thy vain pity bring relief? Forbear,
Nor waste thyself in what avails not him.

VULCAN.

Abhorr'd be all the fine skill of my hands.

STRENGTH.

And why abhorr'd? For of these present toils
Thy art, in very truth, is not the cause.

VULCAN.

Yet wish I it had been some other's lot.

STRENGTH.

All have their lot appointed, save to reign
In heav'n, for liberty is Jove's alone.

VULCAN.

Truth guides thy words, nor have I to gainsay.

STRENGTH.

Why thus reluctant then to bind his chains?
Let not thy sire observe these slow delays.

VULCAN.

The manacles are ready, thou mayst see them.

STRENGTH.

Bind them around his hands; with all thy force
Strike, nail them fast, drive them into the rock.

VULCAN.

Thus far the work is finish'd, and not slightly.

STRENGTH.

Strike harder, strain them, let them not relax;
His craft will work unthought of ways t'escape.

VULCAN.

This arm too is inextricably fix'd.

STRENGTH.

And now clasp this secure, that he may learn
How impotent his craft, oppos'd to Jove.

VULCAN.

This work he only can with justice blame.

STRENGTH.

Across his breast draw now this stubborn bar
Of adamant, fix firm its sharpen'd point.

VULCAN.

Thy miseries, Prometheus, I bewail.

STRENGTH.

Still dost thou linger? Still bewail the foes
Of Jove? Take heed lest thou bewail thyself.

VULCAN.

Thou seest an object horrible to sight.

STRENGTH.

I see him honour'd as his deeds deserve.
But haste thee, fix this strong habergeon on him.

VULCAN.

Constraint lies on me; urge not thou its rigour.

STRENGTH.

Urge thee? I will, and in a higher tone.
Downwards; with all thy force enring his legs.

VULCAN.

This too is finish'd, with no ling'ring speed.

STRENGTH.

Strike hard, drive deep their penetrating points.
Severe his eye, who nicely scans these works.

VULCAN.

Thy voice is harsh, and rugged as thy form.

STRENGTH.

Now fair befall thy softness; yet upbraid not
My ruder and unpitying ruthlessness.

VULCAN.

Let us be gone: the rig'rous task is done.

STRENGTH.

Now triumph in thy insolence; now steal
The glory of the gods, and bear the gift
To mortal man: will they relieve thee now?
False is the boasted prudence of thy name,
Or wanted now to free the from thy fate.

PROMETHEUS, *alone* (3).

Ethereal air, and ye swift-winged winds,

(3) No writer knew better how to preserve propriety of character than Æschylus. Prometheus disdained to answer the ferocious insolence of these ministers of Jupiter, nor could even the tender commiseration of Vulcan elicit a word from him. There is a dignity, and even a sublimity in this silence beyond the expression of words. But as soon as the instruments of tyranny left him, he

Ye rivers springing from fresh founts, ye waves (4),
That o'er th' interminable ocean wreath
Your crisped smiles, thou all-producing earth,
And thee, bright sun, I call, whose flaming orb
Views the wide world beneath, see what, a god,
I suffer from the gods; with what fierce pains,
Behold, what tortures for revolving ages
I here must struggle; such unseemly chains
This new-rais'd ruler of the gods devis'd.
Ah me! That groan bursts from my anguish'd heart.
My present woes and future to bemoan.
When shall these suff'rings find their destined end?
But why that vain inquiry? My clear sight
Looks through the future; unforeseen no ill
Shall come on me: behoves me then to bear
Patient my destin'd fate, knowing how vain
To struggle with necessity's strong pow'r.
But to complain, or not complain, alike
Is unavailable. For favours shown
To mortal man I bear this weight of woe;
Hid in a hollow cane the fount of fire
I privately convey'd, of ev'ry art
Productive, and the noblest gift to men.
And for this slight offence, woe, woe is me!
I bear these chains, fix'd to this savage rock,
Unshelter'd from th' inclemencies of th' air.

bursts into a strain of pathetic lamentation, and invokes all nature to attest his undeserved sufferings. There is a further propriety in this address; the Winds were the sons of Nereus and Doris, the Rivers of Oceanus and Tethys, the Sun of Hyperion and Thea, whose parents were Ouranus and Gaia; these were all kindred gods, benevolent to Prometheus, and deeply affected with his miseries.

(4) Refertur ad levem sonum undarum ventis exagitatarum qui etiam aliquantulum crispant maris dorsum quasi amabili quâdam γελασίᾳ.—STANLEY. The image is here so beautifully poetical, that the translator could not give it up for the cool correction of Pauw.

Ah me! what sound, what softly-breathing odour (5)
Steals on my sense? Be you immortal gods,
Or mortal men, or of th' heroic race,
Whoe'er have reach'd this wild rock's extreme cliff,
Spectators of my woes, or what your purpose,
Ye see me bound, a wretched god, abhorr'd
By Jove, and ev'ry god that treads his courts,
For my fond love to man. Ah me! again
I hear the sound of flutt'ring nigh; the air
Pants to the soft beat of light-moving wings:
All, that approaches now, is dreadful to me.

PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Forbear thy fears: a friendly train (6)
On busy pennons flutt'ring light,
We come, our sire not ask'd in vain,
And reach this promontory's height.

(5) This softly-breathing odour marks the approach of some divinity. When Juno, in the 14th Iliad, retires to her apartment to dress with more than ordinary care,

Here first she bathes, and round her body pours,
Soft oil of fragrance, and ambrosial show'rs:
The winds perfum'd the balmy gale convey
Through heaven, through earth, and all th' aerial way;
Spirit divine! whose exhalation greets
The sense of gods with more than mortal sweets. POPE.

Thus Venus in the first Æneid discovers herself to Æneas:

Ambrosiæque comæ divinum vertice odorem
Spiravere.
Her waving locks immortal odours shed,
And breath'd ambrosial scents around her head. PITT.

(6) Æschylus with great judgement introduces these daughters of Oceanus as attending Prometheus; by their consanguinity they must be a friendly train. In the simplicity of ancient manners their father's consent must first be obtained; and even thus virgin modesty is something hurt. The Nymphs of the waters wore no sandals; hence Thetis is called the silver-footed, as Juno is the golden-slippered queen.

The clanging iron's horrid sound
Re-echo'd through our caves profound;
And though my cheek glows with shame's crimson dye,
Thus with unsandal'd foot with winged speed I fly.

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me! ah me!
Ye virgin sisters, who derive your race
From fruitful Thetis, and th' embrace
Of old Oceanus, your sire, that rolls
Around the wide world his unquiet waves,
This way turn your eyes, behold
With what a chain fix'd to this rugged steep
Th' unenvied station of the rock I keep.

CHORUS.

I see, I see; and o'er my eyes,
Surcharg'd with sorrow's tearful rain,
Dark'ning the misty clouds arise;
I see thy adamantine chain;
In its strong grasp thy limbs confin'd,
And withering in the parching wind:
Such the stern pow'r of heav'n's new-sceptred lord,
And law-controlling Jove's irrevocable word.

PROMETHEUS.

Beneath the earth,
Beneath the gulfs of Tartarus (7), that spread
Interminable o'er the dead,
Had his stern fury fix'd this rigid chain,
Nor gods nor men had triumph'd in my pain.
But pendent in th' ethereal air,

(7) Japetus had three sons, Menœtius, Prometheus, and Epimetheus. Menœtius, for his insolence and audacious attempts, was by Jupiter smitten with thunder, and cast into Tartarus, where the vanquished Titans were imprisoned. Hesiod.—To this Prometheus here alludes.

The pageant gratifies my ruthless foes,
That gaze, insult, and glory in my woes.

CHORUS.

Is there a god, whose sullen soul
Feels a stern joy in thy despair?
Owns he not pity's soft control,
And drops in sympathy the tear?
All, all, save Jove; with fury driv'n
Severe he tames the sons of heav'n;
And he will tame them, till some pow'r arise
To wrest from his strong hand the sceptre of the skies.

PROMETHEUS.

Yet he, e'en he,
That o'er the gods holds his despotic reign,
And fixes this disgraceful chain,
Shall need my aid, the counsels to disclose
Destructive to his honour and his throne.
But not the honied blandishment, that flows
From his alluring lips, shall aught avail;
His rigid menaces shall fail;
Nor will I make the fatal secret known,
Till his proud hands this galling chain unbind,
And his remorse sooths my indignant mind.

CHORUS.

Bold and intrepid is thy soul,
Fir'd with resentment's warmest glow;
And thy free voice disdains control,
Disdains the tort'ring curb of woe.
My softer bosom, thrill'd with fear
Lest heavier ills await thee here,
By milder counsels wishes thee repose:
For Jove's relentless rage no tender pity knows.

PROMETHEUS.

Stern though he be,
And, in the pride of pow'r terrific drest,
Rears o'er insulted right his crest,
Yet gentler thoughts shall mitigate his soul,
When o'er his head this storm shall roll;
Then shall his stubborn indignation bend,
Submit to sue, and court me for a friend.

CHORUS.

But say, relate at large for what offence
Committed doth the wrath of Jove inflict
This punishment so shameful, so severe:
Instruct us, if the tale shocks not thy soul.

PROMETHEUS.

'Tis painful to relate it, to be silent
Is pain: each circumstance is full of woe (8).
When stern debate amongst the gods appear'd,
And discord in the courts of heav'n was rous'd;
Whilst against Saturn some conspiring will'd
To pluck him from the throne, that Jove might reign;
And some, averse, with ardent zeal oppos'd

(8) Gaia, offended with her husband Ouranus for having imprisoned the bravest of her sons, encouraged Saturn to revenge the affront, and armed him with a scythe of adamant, with which he dismembered his father, then seized his throne. But having heard a prophecy that he in his turn should be dethroned by one of his sons, to evade the completion of it, he swallowed down all his male offspring as soon as they were born, till at the birth of Jupiter, Rhea deceived him by a strange device, and privately conveyed the child to Crete, where he was educated, and concealed till he was of age to appear in arms against his father. As Saturn was the youngest son of Ouranus, the two eldest, Titanus and Japetus, claimed their hereditary honours, and opposed the sovereignty of Jupiter. The war had now continued ten years without an intermission, and no prospect of a decision appeared, when Jupiter released Briareus, Cottus, and Gyges, the sons whom Saturn had imprisoned, and by feasting them with nectar and ambrosia, secured their fidelity: these were of immense courage, strength, and size, each had fifty heads and a hundred hands; by their assistance the Titans were totally defeated, and Jupiter acknowledged as the sovereign of the sky. Hesiod describes this battle with wonderful sublimity.

Jove's rising pow'r and empire o'er the gods;
My counsels, though discreetest, wisest, best,
Mov'd not the Titans, those impetuous sons
Of Ouranus and Terra, whose high spirits,
Disdaining milder measures, proudly ween'd
To seize by force the sceptre of the sky.
Oft did my goddess mother, Themis now,
Now Gaia, under various names design'd (9),
Herself the same, foretell me the event,
That not by violence, that not by pow'r,
But gentle arts, the royalty of heav'n
Must be obtain'd. Whilst thus my voice advis'd,
Their headlong rage deign'd me not e'en a look.
What then could wisdom dictate, but to take
My mother, and with voluntary aid
Abet the cause of Jove? Thus by my counsels
In the dark deep Tartarean gulf enclos'd
Old Saturn lies, and his confederate pow'rs.
For these good deeds the tyrant of the skies
Repays me with these dreadful punishments.
For foul mistrust of those that serve them best
Breathes its black poison in each tyrant's heart.
Ask you the cause for which he tortures me?
I will declare it. On his father's throne
Scarce was he seated, on the chiefs of heav'n
He show'r'd his various honours; thus confirming

(9) A multiplicity of names was a mark of dignity; but Themis could not with propriety be called Gaia; this our poet mistook for Rhea. Gaia, is the earth in its primitive uncultivated state, terra inculta; Rhea is the earth in its improved state of cultivation, tellus culta: and as from this culture property arose, Justice had here her office, to assign and protect this property, suum cuique: Themis therefore, as the goddess of Justice, might well have the appellation of Rhea. This is only to show that we understand the mythology of the ancients much better than they did themselves.

His royalty; but for unhappy mortals (10)
Had no regard, and all the present race
Will'd to extirpate, and to form anew.
None, save myself, oppos'd his will; I dar'd;
And boldly pleading sav'd them from destruction,
Sav'd them from sinking to the realms of night.
For this offence I bend beneath these pains,
Dreadful to suffer, piteous to behold:
For mercy to mankind I am not deem'd
Worthy of mercy; but with ruthless hate
In this uncouth appointment am fix'd here
A spectacle dishonourable to Jove.

CHORUS.

Of iron is he form'd and adamant,
Whose breast with social sorrow does not melt
At thy afflictions: I nor wish'd to see them,
Nor see them but with anguish at my heart.

PROMETHEUS.

It is a sight that strikes my friends with pity.

CHORUS.

But had th' offence no further aggravation?

PROMETHEUS.

I hid from men the foresight of their fate.

CHORUS.

What couldst thou find to remedy that ill?

PROMETHEUS.

I sent blind Hope t' inhabit in their hearts.

CHORUS.

A blessing hast thou given to mortal man.

(10) We are not informed for what cause Jupiter was so offended with the unhappy race of mortals; but by way of punishment he withdrew from them παντέχνου πυρὸς σέλας, the fiery flame, that lends its aid to every art: this Prometheus stole from heaven, and reconveyed to them in a hollow cane: hinc illæ lacrymæ.

PROMETHEUS.

Nay more, with generous zeal I gave them Fire.

CHORUS.

Do mortals now enjoy the blazing gift?

PROMETHEUS.

And by it shall give birth to various arts.

CHORUS.

For such offences doth the wrath of Jove
Thus punish thee, relaxing nought of pain?
And is no bound prescrib'd to thy affliction?

PROMETHEUS.

None else, but when his own will shall incline him.

CHORUS.

Who shall incline his will? Hast thou no hope?
Dost thou not see that thou hast much offended?
But to point out th' offence to me were painful,
And might sound harsh to thee: forbear we then;
Bethink thee how thy ills may find an end.

PROMETHEUS.

How easy, when the foot is not entangled
In misery's thorny maze, to give monitions
And precepts to th' afflicted! Of these things
I was not unadvis'd; and my offence
Was voluntary; in man's cause I drew
These evils on my head: but ills like these,
On this aerial rock to waste away,
This desert and unsocial precipice,
My mind presag'd it not. But cease your grief,
Wail not my present woes; on the rough point
Of this firm cliff descend, and there observe
What further may betide me, e'en the whole
Of my hard fate; indulge me, O indulge
This my request, and sympathize with me

Thus wretched; for affliction knows no rest,
But rolls from breast to breast its vagrant tide.

CHORUS.

Not to th' unwilling are thy words directed.
With light foot now this nimble-moving seat,
This pure air, through whose liquid fields the birds
Winnow their wanton way, I leave; and now
Alight I on this rude and craggy rock,
Anxious to hear all thy unhappy tale.

OCEANUS, PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

OCEANUS.

Far distant, through the vast expanse of air,
To thee, Prometheus, on this swift-wing'd steed (11),
Whose neck unrein'd obeys my will, I come,
In social sorrow sympathizing with thee.
To this the near affinity of blood
Moves me; and be assur'd, that tie apart,
There is not who can tax my dear regard
Deeper than thou: believe me, this is truth,
Not the false glozings of a flatt'ring tongue.
Instruct me then in what my pow'r may serve thee,
For never shalt thou say thou hast a friend
More firm, more constant, than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me! What draws thee hither? Art thou come
Spectator of my toils? How hast thou ventur'd
To leave the ocean waves, from thee so call'd,
Thy rock-roof'd grottos arch'd by nature's hand,
And land upon this iron-teeming earth?
Comest thou to visit and bewail my ills?

(11) Il paroît monté sur je ne scai quel animal aîlé; bizarrerie inexplicable.—Brumoy.—Of this breed was the winged horse of Astolfo.—Fourth book, 13th c. Orlando Furioso.

Behold this sight, behold this friend of Jove,
Th' assertor of his empire, bending here
Beneath a weight of woes by him inflicted.

OCEANUS.

I see it all, and wish to counsel thee,
Wise as thou art, to milder measures: learn
To know thyself; new model thy behaviour,
As the new monarch of the gods requires.
What if thy harsh and pointed speech should reach
The ear of Jove, though on his distant throne
High-seated, might they not inflame his rage
T' inflict such tortures, that thy present pains
Might seem a recreation and a sport?
Cease then, unhappy sufferer, cease thy braves,
And meditate the means of thy deliverance.
To thee perchance this seems the cold advice
Of doting age; yet, trust me, woes like these
Are earnings of the lofty-sounding tongue.
But thy unbending spirit disdains to yield
E'en to afflictions, to the present rather
Ambitious to add more. Yet shalt thou not,
If my voice may be heard, lift up thy heel
To kick against the pricks; so rough, thou seest
So uncontroll'd the monarch of the skies.
But now I go, and will exert my pow'r,
If haply I may free thee from thy pains.
Meanwhile be calm; forbear this haughty tone:
Has not thy copious wisdom taught thee this,
That mischief still attends the petulant tongue?

PROMETHEUS.

I gratulate thy fortune, that on thee
No blame hath lighted, though associate with me
In all, and daring equally. But now

Forbear, of my condition take no care;
Thou wilt not move him; nothing moves his rigour:
Take heed then, lest to go brings harm on thee.

OCEANUS.

Wiser for others than thyself I find
Thy thoughts; yet shalt thou not withhold my speed.
And I have hopes, with pride I speak it, hopes
T' obtain this grace, and free thee from thy sufferings.

PROMETHEUS.

For this thou hast my thanks; thy courtesy
With grateful memory ever shall be honour'd.
But think not of it, the attempt were vain,
Nor would thy labour profit me; cease then,
And leave me to my fate: however wretched,
I wish not to impart my woes to others.

OCEANUS.

No; for thy brother's fate, th' unhappy Atlas (12),
Afflicts me: on the western shore he stands,
Supporting on his shoulders the vast pillar
Of Heav'n and Earth, a weight of cumbrous grasp.
Him too, the dweller of Cilicia's caves,
I saw, with pity saw, Earth's monstrous son,
With all his hundred heads (13), subdued by Force,

(12) We have before seen one brother of Prometheus driven thunder-struck to Tartarus: we have here another of that unhappy family, the famous Atlas, condemned to support in his arms the pillars of the heavens.

(13) After the defeat of the Titans, Gaia, from an adventure with Tartarus, brought forth this her youngest son, the most enormous and most terrible of all the giant race: he had a hundred dragon-heads; his eyes glared fire; from all his heads he uttered every horrid sound, sometimes intelligible to the gods, sometimes the lowing of a bull, sometimes the roaring of a lion, sometimes the howl of dogs, sometimes the hiss of serpents: his force was so formidable, as alone to endanger the sovereignty of the sky, and to compel Jupiter to exert his whole strength and all his vollied thunder, of which Hesiod has given us a noble description. Happily for poetry, this monster, instead of being driven down to Tartarus, was defeated in the plains of Sicily, where the mountain Ætna was

The furious Typhon, who 'gainst all the gods
Made war; his horrid jaws with serpent-hiss
Breath'd slaughter, from his eyes the gorgon-glare
Of baleful lightnings flash'd, as his proud force
Would rend from Jove his empire of the sky.
But him the vengeful bolt, instinct with fire,
Smote sore, and dash'd him from his haughty vaunts,
Pierc'd through his soul, and wither'd all his strength.
Thus stretch'd out huge in length beneath the roots
Of Ætna, near Trinacria's narrow sea,
Astonied, blasted, spiritless he lies;
On whose high summit Vulcan holds his seat,
And forms the glowing mass. In times to come
Hence streams of torrent fire with hideous roar
Shall burst, and with its wasteful mouths devour
All the fair fields of fruitful Sicily.
Such rage shall Typhon, blasted as he is
With Jove's fierce lightning, pour incessant forth
In smoking whirlwinds and tempestuous flame.

PROMETHEUS.

Thou art not unexperienc'd, nor hast need
Of my instruction; save thyself, how best
Thy wisdom shall direct thee. I will bear
My present fate, till Jove's harsh wrath relents.

OCEANUS.

Know'st thou not this, Prometheus, that soft speech
Is to distemper'd wrath medicinal?

PROMETHEUS.

When seasonably the healing balm's applied;
Else it exasperates the swelling heart.

hurled upon him. The genius of Hesiod seems to have taken fire from hence, and communicated the flame to Æschylus, Pindar, and Virgil.

OCEANUS.

But in the fair endeavour, in th' attempt,
What disadvantage, tell me, dost thou see?

PROMETHEUS.

Unfruitful labour, and light-thoughted folly.

OCEANUS.

Be that my weakness then. Oft when the wise
Appears not wise, he works the greatest good.

PROMETHEUS.

This will be deem'd my simple policy.

OCEANUS.

These words indeed remand me to my grotto.

PROMETHEUS.

Cease to bewail me, lest thou wake his wrath.

OCEANUS.

What, the new monarch's of heav'n's potent throne?

PROMETHEUS.

Take care his indignation be not rous'd.

OCEANUS.

Thy misery shall be my monitor.

PROMETHEUS.

Go then, be cautious, hold thy present judgement.

OCEANUS.

Thy words add speed to my dispatch. Already
My plumed steed his levell'd wings displays
To fan the liquid air, through fond desire
In his own lodge his wearied speed to rest.

PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

For thee I heave the heart-felt sigh,
My bosom melting at thy woes;
For thee my tear-distilling eye
In streams of tender sorrow flows:

For Jove's imperious ruthless soul,
That scorns the pow'r of mild control,
Chastens with horrid tort'ring pain
Not known to gods, before his iron reign.

E'en yet this ample region o'er
Hoarse strains of sullen woe resound (14),
Thy state, thy brother's state deplore,
Age-honour'd glories ruin'd round.
Thy woes, beneath the sacred shade (15)
Of Asia's pastur'd forests laid,
The chaste inhabitant bewails
Thy groans re-echoing through his plaintive vales.

The Colchian virgin, whose bold hand
Undaunted grasps the warlike spear;
On earth's last verge the Scythian band,
The torpid lake Mæotis near;
Arabia's martial race, that wield
The sharp lance in th' embattled field,
Through all their rock-built cities moan,
The crags of Caucasus return the groan.

One other, e'er thy galling chain,
Of heaven's high sons with tortures quell'd,
That rack each joint, each sinew strain,
Titanian Atlas I beheld;
His giant strength condemn'd to bear
The solid, vast, and pond'rous sphere.

(14) The chorus here alludes to the punishment of Menœtius and Atlas, mentioned before.

(15) This stanza and the next relate to Prometheus, the last to Atlas. All Asia lamented the sufferings of the former; the earth, the sea, and the gloomy depths of Pluto sympathize with Atlas, for whilst he bore the heavens on his shoulders, all below must be violently pressed beneath his feet.—PAUW.

The springs whose fresh streams swell around,
The hoarse waves from their depths profound,
And all the gloomy realms below,
Sigh to his sighs, and murmur to his woe.

PROMETHEUS.

It is not pride; deem nobler of me, virgins;
It is not pride, that held me silent thus;
The thought of these harsh chains, that hang me here,
Cuts to my heart. Yet who, like me, advanc'd
To their high dignity our new-rais'd gods?
But let me spare the tale, to you well known.
The ills of man you've heard: I form'd his mind,
And through the cloud of barb'rous ignorance
Diffus'd the beams of knowledge. I will speak,
Not taxing them with blame, but my own gifts
Displaying, and benevolence to them.
They saw indeed, they heard; but what avail'd
Or sight, or sense of hearing, all things rolling
Like the unreal imagery of dreams,
In wild confusion mix'd? The lightsome wall
Of finer masonry, the rafter'd roof
They knew not; but, like ants still buried, delv'd (16)
Deep in the earth, and scoop'd their sunless caves.
Unmark'd the seasons chang'd, the biting winter,
The flow'r perfumed spring, the ripening summer
Fertile of fruits. At random all their works,
Till I instructed them to mark the stars,

(16) The translator has followed the emendation of Pauw; for though ἀείσυρροι be a proper and general epithet for the provident ants, who are therefore by Ovid styled frugilegæ, and it is to the purpose of Horace, when he says of this little animal, Ore trahit quodcunque potest, yet in this place it has no pertinent analogy to untutored barbarians dwelling in caves: it was not then the industrious forecast of the ant to which Æschylus had occasion to allude, but its nest scooped in the ground: ἀείσοος conveys the precise idea.

Their rising, and, a harder science yet (17),
Their setting. The rich train of marshall'd numbers
I taught them, and the meet array of letters.
T' impress these precepts on their hearts I sent

(17) Of the many advantages for which the translator is indebted to Æschylus, the greatest and most valuable is the honour which he receives from the acquaintance of some persons of the highest rank, and the most distinguished eminence in literature; among these he is proud to reckon

RICHARD PAUL JODRELL, ESQ.

This gentleman has been so kind as to communicate his own observations on one tragedy, the Siege of Thebes, with leave to the compiler of these notes to select from them such as might be found to coincide with his plan; a liberal use has been made of these, enough to make the reader regret that the pressing call for this publication would not admit of a delay, till the same learned person's observations on the other tragedies could be revised; but ex pede Herculem.

The translator had religiously adhered to his original in the δυσκρίτους δύσεις, v. 457. but was totally at a loss to account for the superior difficulty of marking the setting of the stars. He took the liberty to communicate his embarrassment to Mr. Jodrell, and was immediately favoured with this clear and judicious solution of the passage:

" It is difficult to ascertain the degree of knowledge, which the philosophers " contemporary with Æschylus had of the fixed stars; for Hipparchus the Rho- " dian, who flourished only 120 years before Christ, which was near 420 years " after the birth of Æschylus, was the first who dared to undertake a thing, " which, says Pliny, seemed to surpass the power of a divinity, that of number- " ing the stars for posterity, and reducing them to a rule. Because the civil " year of the ancients did not correspond with the apparent annual motion of " the sun, it was impossible by the calendar to ascertain the precise times for " the purposes of agriculture, as the same day of the month would not happen " in the same season of the year; it was necessary therefore to have recourse to " more certain standards and invariable characters to distinguish times, which " the risings and the settings of the stars naturally afford: Prometheus, there- " fore, with great propriety might boast of this signal and important discovery to " mankind: of which Virgil, in his first Georgic, when he delivers his poetical " precepts for the husbandman, makes a particular injunction,

" Præterea tam sunt Arcturi sidera nobis,
" Hædorumque dies servandi, et lucidus anguis, &c.

" Hesiod had before given precepts of a similar nature.

" Now the rising of a star, as defined by Chrysippus, is its advancement above " the earth, and its setting the occultation of it under the earth (See Stanley's " History of Philosophy, part viii. c. 8.). And astronomers have divided the " risings and settings of stars, according to their technical expressions, into " Cosmical, Achronical, and Heliacal, which are thus explained by Keil in his

Memory, the active mother of all wisdom.
I taught the patient steer to bear the yoke,
In all his toils joint-labourer with man.
By me the harness'd steed was train'd to whirl
The rapid car, and grace the pride of wealth.
The tall bark, lightly bounding o'er the waves,
I taught its course, and wing'd its flying sail.
To man I gave these arts; with all my wisdom
Yet want I now one art, that useful art
To free myself from these afflicting chains.

CHORUS.

Unseemly are thy sufferings, sprung from error
And impotence of mind. And now enclos'd
With all these ills, as some unskilful leach
That sinks beneath his malady, thy soul
Desponds, nor seeks medicinal relief.

PROMETHEUS.

Hear my whole story, thou wilt wonder more,
What useful arts, what science I invented.
This first and greatest: when the fell disease
Prey'd on the human frame, relief was none,

" 19th lecture, p. 222. ' A star is said to rise or set cosmically, which rises
" ' or sets when the sun rises; achronically, when it rises while the sun sets, that
" ' is in the evening, when it is in opposition to the sun, and is visible all night;
" ' heliacally, when after it has been in conjunction with the sun, and on that
" ' account invisible, it comes to be at such a distance from him as to be seen
" ' in the morning before sun rising, when the sun, by his apparent motion, re-
" ' cedes from the star towards the east: but the heliacal setting is, when the
" ' sun approaches so near a star, that it hides it with its beams, which keep the
" ' fainter light of the star from being perceived.' This I conceive to be the
" meaning of the poet in his epithet of δυσκρίτους, or

" ——— a harder science yet,
" Their setting.———

" For by this philosophical solution the observation of the settings of the stars
" must be attended with more difficulty than that of the risings: this appears to
" me to be the most natural explication of this passage."

Nor healing drug, nor cool refreshing draught,
Nor pain-assuaging unguent; but they pin'd
Without redress, and wasted, till I taught them
To mix the balmy medicine, of pow'r
To chase each pale disease, and soften pain.
I taught the various modes of prophecy,
What truth the dream portends, the omen what
Of nice distinction, what the casual sight
That meets us on the way; the flight of birds,
When to the right, when to the left they take
Their airy course, their various ways of life,
Their feuds, their fondnesses, their social flocks.
I taught th' Haruspex to inspect the entrails,
Their smoothness, and their colour to the gods
Grateful, the gall, the liver streak'd with veins,
The limbs involv'd in fat, and the long chine
Plac'd on the blazing altar; from the smoke
And mounting flame to mark th' unerring omen.
These arts I taught. And all the secret treasures
Deep buried in the bowels of the earth,
Brass, iron, silver, gold, their use to man,
Let the vain tongue make what high vaunts it may,
Are my inventions all; and, in a word,
Prometheus taught each useful art to man.

CHORUS.

Let not thy love to man o'erleap the bounds
Of reason, nor neglect thy wretched state:
So my fond hope suggests thou shalt be free
From these base chains, nor less in pow'r than Jove.

PROMETHEUS.

Not thus, it is not in the Fates that thus
These things should end: crush'd with a thousand wrongs,

A thousand woes, I shall escape these chains.
Necessity is stronger far than art.

CHORUS.

Who then is ruler of necessity?

PROMETHEUS.

The triple Fates and unforgetting furies.

CHORUS.

Must Jove then yield to their superior pow'r?

PROMETHEUS.

He no way shall escape his destin'd fate.

CHORUS.

What, but eternal empire, is his fate?

PROMETHEUS.

Thou may'st not know this now: forbear t' inquire.

CHORUS.

Is it of moment what thou keep'st thus close?

PROMETHEUS.

No more of this discourse; it is not time
Now to disclose that which requires the seal
Of strictest secrecy; by guarding which
I shall escape the misery of these chains.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Never, never may my soul
Jove's all-ruling pow'r defy;
Never feel his harsh control,
Sov'reign ruler of the sky.
When the hallow'd steer has bled (18),
When the sacred feast is spread,

(18) The chorus here alludes to the solemn annual festival, which the gods held with their father Oceanus, and at which they showed their piety and reverence by their attendance and ministry.—PAUW.——See Homer, 1 Il. v. 423. with Mr. Pope's note.

'Midst the crystal waves below,
Whence father Ocean's boundless billows flow,
Let not my foot be slow:
There, th' ethereal guests among,
No rude speech disgrace my tongue.
May my mind this rev'rence keep;
Print it strong, and grave it deep.

ANTISTROPHE.

When through life's extended scene
Hope her steadfast lustre throws,
Swells the soul with joy serene,
With sublimest triumph glows.
Seest thou this pure lustre shine?
Are these heart-felt raptures thine?
My cold blood curdles in my veins,
To see thy hideous woes, thy tort'ring pains,
And adamantine chains.
Thy free soul, untaught to fear,
Scorn'd the danger threat'ning near;
And for mortals dar'd defy
The sovereign monarch of the sky.

EPODE.

Vain thy ardour, vain thy grace,
They nor force nor aid repay;
Like a dream man's feeble race,
Short-liv'd reptiles of a day.
Shall their weak devices move
Th' order'd harmony of Jove?
Touch'd with pity of thy pain,
All sad and slow I pour the moral strain;
Chang'd from that melting vein,
When the light mellifluous measure

Round thy bath, and round thy bed
For our sea-nymph sister spread,
Awoke young love and bridal pleasure,
And pour'd the soul of harmony,
To greet the bright Hesione.

IO, PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

IO.

Whither, ah whither am I borne (19)!
To what rude shore, what barb'rous race? O thou,
Whoe'er thou art, that chain'd to that bleak rock,
The seat of desolation, ruest thy crimes,
Say on what shore my wretched footsteps stray.—
Again that sting!—Ah me, that form again!—
With all his hundred eyes the earth-born Argus—
Cover it, Earth! See, how it glares upon me,
The horrid spectre!—Wilt thou not, O Earth,
Cover the dead, that from thy dark abyss
He comes to haunt me, to pursue my steps,
And drive me foodless o'er the barren strand?
Hoarse sounds the reed-compacted pipe (20), a note

(19) The poet here introduces to us the most singular and illustrious personage of ancient Greece, from whom the noblest families were proud of deriving their pedigree; the bare mention of her was a compliment to their vanity, and therefore always well accepted; it had a peculiar propriety here, as it prepared the Athenian spectator to receive her great descendant Hercules, who was to appear in the next play, which unhappily is lost. In the Supplicants we shall have occasion to speak more particularly of her.

(20) So Ovid seems to have understood this passage,

Junctisque canendo
Vincere arundinibus servantia lumina tentat.

And still betwixt, his tuneful pipe he plies,
And watch'd his hour to close the keeper's eyes.

DRYDEN.

In her distraction, she thought she saw the spectre of her keeper Argos; she thought she heard the sound of the pipe with which Mercury lulled all his hundred eyes to sleep.

Sullen and drowsy.—Miserable me!
Whither will these wide-wand'ring errors lead me?
How, son of Saturn, how have I offended,
That with these stings, these tortures thou pursuest me,
And drivest to madness my affrighted soul!
Hear me, supreme of gods, O hear thy suppliant,
Blast me with lightnings, bury me in th' earth,
Or cast me to the monsters of the sea;
But spare these toils, spare these wide-wand'ring errors,
Which drive me round the world, and know no rest.

CHORUS.

Hear'st thou the voice of this lamenting virgin?
For such she is, though in that form disguis'd.

PROMETHEUS.

I hear her griefs, that whirl her soul to madness,
Daughter of Inachus, whose love enflames
The heart of Jove; hence Juno's jealous rage
Drives the poor wanderer restless o'er the world.

IO.

Whence is it that I hear my father's name?
Speak to my misery, tell me who thou art;
What wretch art thou, that to a wretch like me
Utterest these truths, naming the malady,
Which, heav'n-inflicted, stings my tortur'd soul
To phrensy? Hence with hurrying steps I rove
Foodless, pursued by never-ceasing wrath.
Ah me! What child of misery ever suffer'd
Misery like mine? But tell me, clearly tell me,
What woes await me yet, what ease, what cure?
Say, if thou know'st, speak, tell a wand'ring virgin.

PROMETHEUS.

All, thou canst wish to learn, I'll tell thee clearly,

Wrapt in no veil abstruse; but in clear terms (21),
As friend to friend. Thine eyes behold Prometheus,
Whose warm benevolence gave fire to men.

IO.

O thou, the common blessing of mankind,
Wretched Prometheus, wherefore are these sufferings?

PROMETHEUS.

Scarce have I ceas'd lamenting my misfortunes.

IO.

And wilt thou not allow me that sad office?

PROMETHEUS.

Ask what thou wilt, thou shalt learn all from me.

IO.

Say then, who bound thee in that rifted rock?

PROMETHEUS.

The ruthless will of Jove, but Vulcan's hand.

IO.

In what offending art thou chasten'd thus?

PROMETHEUS.

Suffice it thee so much has been declar'd.

IO.

Say then what time shall end my wretched wand'rings.

PROMETHEUS.

Better repose in ignorance, than know.

IO.

Whate'er my woes to come, hide them not from me.

(21) Prometheus had mentioned her father's name, and the cause of her sufferings; from whence Io, rightly conceiving him to be a prophet, had requested him to tell her *clearly* what woes yet awaited her, and how they might be remedied: he answers, I will tell thee *clearly*, without that ænigmatical obscurity which had rendered oracles famous for

Dark-utter'd answers of ambiguous sense.

PROMETHEUS.

That favour unreluctant could I grant thee.

IO.

Why this delay then to declare the whole?

PROMETHEUS.

Ungrateful task to rend thy soul with anguish.

IO.

Regard not me more than is pleasing to me.

PROMETHEUS.

Conjur'd thus strongly I must speak. Hear then.

CHORUS.

Not yet: this mournful pleasure let me share:
Let us first learn the story of her woes;
Her lips will teach us each sad circumstance
Of misery past; the future be thy task.

PROMETHEUS.

Vouchsafe t'indulge their wish; they merit it;
And are besides the sisters of thy father (22).
Nor light the recompense, when they, who hear,
Melt at the melancholy tale, and drop,
In pity drop, the sympathizing tear.

IO.

Ill would excuse become me, or denial;
Take then the plain unornamented tale
Ye wish to hear; though sad the task enjoin'd,
And hard: for how relate the heav'n-sent tempest
That burst upon my head, my form thus chang'd,
And all the weight of wo that overwhelms me?
Still, when retir'd to rest, air-bodied forms (23)

(22) Inachus, the father of Iö, was the son of Oceanus and Tethys.

(23) Iö tells her tale with great propriety, and by preserving the decorum of her own character, consults the dignity of her illustrious descendants. The cir-

Visit my slumbers nightly, soothing me
With gentle speech, "Blest maid, why hoard for ever
" Thy virgin treasure, when the highest nuptials
" Await thy choice; the flames of soft desire
" Have touch'd the heart of Jove; he burns with love:
" Disdain not, gentle virgin, ah! disdain not
" The couch of Jove; to Lerna's deep recess,
" Where graze thy father's herds the meads along,
" Go, gentle virgin, crown the god's desires."
The night returns, the visionary forms
Return again, and haunt my troubled soul
Forbidding rest, till to my father's ear
I dar'd disclose the visions of the night.
To Pytho, to Dodona's vocal grove
He sent his seers, anxious to know what best
Was pleasing to the gods. Return'd they bring
Dark-utter'd answers of ambiguous sense.
At length one oracle distinct and plain
Pronounc'd its mandates, charging Inachus
To drive me from his house and from my country,
To rove at large o'er earth's extremest bounds:
Should he refuse, the vengeful bolt of Jove,
Wing'd with red flames, would all his race destroy.
Obedient to the Pythian god he drove me
Unwilling from his house, himself unwilling
Compell'd by Jove, and harsh necessity.
Straight was my sense disorder'd, my fair form

cumstance of the vision, and the influence of the god over her slumbers, is a fine stroke of nature, embellished with a rich poetical imagination;

These are the day-dreams of a maid in love.

Ovid, who had no prejudice of high-descended ancestry to flatter, has taken the liberty to depart from this bienseance; Pellicis Argolicæ is a coarse appellation, and his poem is so much the worse for it.

Chang'd, as you see, disfigur'd with these horns;
And tortur'd with the bryze's horrid sting,
Wild with my pain with frantic speed I hurried
To Cenchrea's vale with silver-winding streams (24)
Irriguous, and the fount whence Lerna spreads
Its wide expanse of waters; close behind
In wrathful mood walk'd Argus, earth-born herdsman,
With all his eyes observant of my steps.
Him unawares a sudden fate depriv'd
Of life; whilst I, stung with that heav'n-sent pest,
Am driv'n with devious speed from land to land.
Thou hast my tale. If aught of woes to come
Thy prescient mind divines, relate them freely;
Nor through false pity with fallacious words
Sooth my vain hopes, my soul abhors as base
The fabling tongue of glozing courtesy.

CHORUS.

No more, no more, forbear. Ah never, never
Conceiv'd I that a tale so strange should reach
My ears; that miseries, woes, distresses, terrors,
Dreadful to sight, intolerable to sense,
Should shock me thus: wo, wo, unhappy fate!
How my soul shudders at the fate of Iö!

PROMETHEUS.

Already dost thou sigh, already tremble?
Check these emotions till the whole is heard.

CHORUS.

Speak, show us: to the sick some gleam of comfort
Flows from the knowledge of their pains to come.

(24) The translator hath here adopted the very judicious reading of Pauw with regard to Cenchrea; but notwithstanding his aliud melius et facilius tibi dabo, prefers the Λερνης τε κρηνην of Canterus to his Λερνης or Λερνην αδρην τε.

PROMETHEUS.

Your first request with ease has been obtain'd;
For from her lips you wish'd to hear the tale
Of her afflictions. Hear the rest; what woes
From Juno's rage await this suff'ring virgin.
And thou with deep attention mark my words,
Daughter of Inachus; and learn from them
The traces of thy way. First then, from hence
Turn to the orient sun, and pass the height
Of these uncultur'd mountains; thence descend
To where the wandering Scythians, train'd to bear
The distant-wounding bow, on wheels aloft
Roll on their wattled cottages; to these
Approach not nigh, but turn thy devious steps
Along the rough verge of the murm'ring main,
And pass the barb'rous country: on the left
The Chalybes inhabit, whose rude hands
Temper the glowing steel; beware of these,
A savage and inhospitable race (25).
Thence shalt thou reach the banks of that proud stream,
Which from its (26) roaring torrent takes its name;
But pass it not, tempt not its dangerous depths
Unfordable, till now thy weary steps
Shall reach the distant bound of Caucasus,
Monarch of mountains; from whose extreme height
The bursting flood rolls down his pow'r of waters.
Passing those star-aspiring heights, descend
Where to the south the Amazonian tents,
Hostile to men, stretch o'er the plain; whose troops
In after times shall near Thermodon's banks

(25) The horrid custom of sacrificing strangers, whose ill fortune drove them on their coasts, marks the savage and inhospitable manners of these barbarians.

(26) Araxis.

Fix in Themiscyra's tow'rs their martial rule,
Where Salmydesia points her cruel rocks,
And glories in her wrecks: this female train
With courteous zeal shall guide thee in thy way.
Arriving where the dark Cimmerian lake
Spreads from its narrow mouth its vast expanse,
Leave it, and boldly plunge thy vent'rous foot
In the Mæotic straits; the voice of fame
Shall eternize thy passage, and from thee
Call it the Bosphorus (27): there shalt thou quit
The shores of Europe, and intrepid reach
The continent of Asia.—Seems he now,
This tyrant of the skies, seems he in all (28)
Of fierce and headlong violence, when his love
Plunges a mortal in such deep distresses?
A rugged wooer, virgin, have thy charms
Won thee; for be assur'd what I have told thee
Is but a prelude to the woes untold.

IO.

Ah miserable me!

PROMETHEUS.

Again that exclamation, that deep groan!
What wilt thou do, when thou shalt learn the rest?

(27) Bosphorus, the passage of the heifer.

(28) The Chorus had declared themselves to be deeply affected at the narrative of Iö; Prometheus therefore, having enumerated more and greater woes which yet awaited her, addresses them thus: Think you that this tyrant of the skies is of a fierce and headlong violence, when he has thus driven a mortal, even whilst he is a suitor for her love, to these wanderings? Then turning to the unhappy sufferer, he says,

A rugged wooer, virgin, have thy charms
Won thee.

There is in this a malignant triumph well suited to the implacable resentment of the speaker, which would not allow him to acknowledge that Jupiter did not voluntarily inflict these miseries on his favourite fair, but that with great reluctance he was obliged to make this sacrifice to the jealous and enraged Juno.

CHORUS.

Remains there aught of ills yet to be told?

PROMETHEUS.

A wide tempestuous sea of baleful woes.

IO.

What then has life desirable? Why rather
From this rude cliff leap I not headlong down,
And end my woes? Better to die at once,
Than linger out a length of life in pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Ill wouldst thou bear my miseries, by the Fates
Exempt from death, the refuge of th' afflicted.
But my afflictions know no bounds, till Jove
Falls from th' imperial sovereignty of heav'n.

IO.

Shall he then fall? Shall the time come, when Jove (29)
Shall sink dethron'd? I think I should rejoice
To see the tyrant's ruin: Should I not,
Since from his hands I suffer all these ills.

PROMETHEUS.

Then be thou well assur'd it shall be so.

IO.

And who shall wrest th' imperial sceptre from him?

PROMETHEUS.

Himself, destroy'd by his improvident counsels.

(29) This is one of those fine touches which distinguish a master's hand. Iö had been cruelly treated, and was sinking even to desperation under the sense of the miseries which she was yet to suffer, when she was told that her rugged wooer, from whom all her afflictions arose, should one day be deprived of the sovereignty of heaven. Here, instead of that pleasure with which it was supposed the predicted event would fill her indignant mind, her concealed love just rises to soften her resentment, and then, fearful of a discovery, hides itself beneath her conscious dignity, and the modest reserve of her sex: nay, the very questions which she afterwards asks, apparently to show her joy for the ruin of Jupiter, discover the most delicate tincture of tender and delicate sensibility.

IO.

Oh say, if harmless what I ask, say how.

PROMETHEUS.

Urging a marriage he shall dearly rue.

IO.

Heav'n-sprung, or mortal? If permitted, say.

PROMETHEUS.

What matters which? It may not be disclos'd.

IO.

Shall then a wife deprive him of the throne?

PROMETHEUS.

She greater than the sire shall bear a son.

IO.

Has he no means of pow'r t'avert this fate?

PROMETHEUS.

None, till from these vile chains I shall be free.

IO.

And who, 'gainst Jove's high will, shall set thee free?

PROMETHEUS.

One, of necessity, from thee descended.

IO.

From me! My son release thee from thy pains?

PROMETHEUS.

Third of thy race, first numb'ring ten descents (30).

IO.

Oracular this, of difficult conjecture.

PROMETHEUS.

Check then thy wish, nor seek to know thy toils.

IO.

Do not hold forth a grace, then snatch it from me.

(30) From Iö descended Epaphus, Libye, Belus, Danaus, Hypermnestra, Abas, Prœtus, Acrisius, Danaë, Perseus, Electrion, Alcmena, Hercules.

PROMETHEUS.

Of two relations I will grant thee either.

IO.

Propose the two, then leave the choice to me.

PROMETHEUS.

Shall I declare the rest of thy misfortunes,
Or dost thou wish to know him that shall free me?

CHORUS.

The first to her, to me this other grace
Vouchsafe, nor my request treat with disdain.
To her impart what toils remain; to me
Him that shall free thee; this I most desire.

PROMETHEUS.

This your request I shall not be averse
To gratify, and tell you all you wish.
First for thy various wand'rings: Mark my words,
And grave them on the tablet of thy heart.
When thou shalt pass the flood, the common bound
Of either continent, direct thy steps
Right to the fiery portals of the east,
The sun's bright walk, along the roaring beach,
Till thou shalt come to the Gorgonian plains
Of Cisthine, where dwell the swan-like forms
Of Phorcys' daughters, bent and white with age (31);

(31) There is something so very ingenious in Mr. Bryant's analysis of these daughters of Phorcys, that the most rigid exactors of historical proof may not be offended to see it here laid before the reader. This history, he says, relates to an Amonian temple founded in the extreme parts of Africa, in which there were three priestesses of Canaanitish race, who on that account are said to be in the shape of swans, that bird being the ensign of their nation. The notion of their having but one eye among them took its rise from an hieroglyphic very common in Egypt, and probably in Canaan: this was the representation of an eye, which was said to be engraved upon the pediment of their temples. This may have

One common eye have these, one common tooth,
And never does the sun with cheerful ray
Visit them darkling, nor the moon's pale orb
That silvers o'er the night. The Gorgons nigh,
Their sisters these, spread their broad wings, and wreath
Their horrid hair with serpents, fiends abhorr'd,
Whom never mortal could behold, and live.
Be therefore warn'd, and let it profit thee
To learn what else detestable to sight
Lies in thy way, and dang'rous. Shun the Gryphins,
Those dumb and rav'nous dogs of Jove. Avoid
The Arimaspian troops, whose frowning foreheads
Glare with one blazing eye; along the banks,
Where Pluto rolls his streams of gold, they rein (32)
Their foaming steeds; approach them not, but seek
A land far distant, where the tawny race (33)
Dwell near the fountains of the sun, and where

been one reason, among others, why the Cyclopians and Arimaspians are represented with one eye,

> The Arimaspian troops, whose frowning foreheads
> Glare with one blazing eye.

Bryant's Analysis, vol. i. p. 380. For his account of Medusa, see p. 510, &c.

(32) Pluto is here the name of a river, ἀπὸ τοῦ πλούτου, from the gold found there; with which these northern parts are by historians said to abound, but to be inaccessible on account of the Gryphins, the fiercest and most formidable of all birds, against which the Arimaspians are continually in arms. STANLEY.

(33) The ancients placed the Æthiopians at the extremities of the earth not only towards the south, but to the east, and also to the west; hence they are said to dwell near the fountains of the sun, so Virgil,

> Oceani finem juxta solemque cadentem
> Ultimus Æthiopum locus est.

The river Æthiops, Niger, or Nigris, rolls his black stream through immense deserts scorched with intolerable heat, till it comes to its last cataract; thence it falls into Egypt, and assumes the name of the Nile. STANLEY.—"Four miles "below Cairo it divideth, making of the richest portion of the land a triangular "island, named Delta, in that it beareth the form of the Greek Δ." SANDYS.

The Nigris pours his dusky waters; wind
Along his banks, till thou shalt reach the fall
Where from the mountains with Papyrus crown'd
The venerable Nile impetuous pours
His headlong torrent; he shall guide thy steps
To those irriguous plains, whose triple sides
His arms surround; there have the Fates decreed
Thee and thy sons to form the lengthen'd line.—
Is aught imperfect, aught obscure? Resume
Th' inquiry, and be taught with greater clearness:
I have more leisure than I wish to have.

CHORUS.

If thou hast aught remaining, aught omitted,
To tell her of her woful wand'rings, speak it:
If all has been declar'd, to us vouchsafe
The grace we ask; what, thou rememb'rest well.

PROMETHEUS.

Her wand'ring in full measure has she heard.
That she may know she has not heard in vain,
Her labours pass'd, ere these rude rocks she reach'd,
Will I recite, good argument that truth
Stamps my predictions sure: nor shall I use
A length of words, but speak thy wand'rings briefly.
Soon as thy foot reach'd the Molossian ground,
And round Dodona's ridgy heights, where stands
The seat oracular of Thesprotian Jove,
And, wondrous prodigy, the vocal groves,
These in clear, plain, unquestionable terms
Hail'd thee "Illustrious wife of Jove that shall be,"
If that may sooth thy soul. The tort'ring sting
Thence drove thee wand'ring o'er the wave-wash'd strand
To the great gulf of Rhea, thence thy course
Through the vex'd billows hither. But know this,

In after times shall that deep gulf from thee
Be call'd th' Ionian, and preserve to men
The memory of thy passage. This to thee,
Proving the prescience of my mind, that sees
More than appears: the rest to you and her,
Resuming my discourse, I speak in common.
On the land's extreme verge a city stands,
Canobus, proudly elevate, nigh where the Nile
Rolls to the sea his rich stream: there shall Jove
Heal thy distraction, and with gentle hand
Sooth thee to peace. Of his high race a son,
The dusky Epaphus, shall rise, and rule
The wide-extended land o'er which the Nile
Pours his broad waves. In the fifth line from him
Fifty fair sisters shall return to Argos
Unwillingly, to fly the kindred beds
Of fifty brothers; these with eager speed,
Swift as the falcon's flight when he pursues
The dove at hand, shall follow, nor obtain
The nuptials, which th' indignant gods deny.
These shall Pelasgia see by female hands
Welt'ring in gore, the night's convenient gloom
Fav'ring the daring deed? each female draws
The trenchant sword, and in her husband's blood
Stains the broad blade. Thus fatal to my foes
Be love! Yet one shall feel its softer flame
Melting her soul, and from the general carnage
Preserve her husband, choosing to be deem'd
Of base degenerate spirit, rather than stain
Her gentle hands with blood. From her shall Argos
Receive a long imperial line of kings.
The full distinct relation would be tedious.
From her shall rise the hero, strong to wing

The dreaded shaft; he from these tort'ring pains
Shall set me free: this my age-honour'd mother,
Titanian Themis, with oracular voice
Foretold; but when, or how, requires a length
Of narrative, which known would nought avail thee.

IO.

Ah me! ah wretched me! That pang again!
Again that fiery pang, whose madd'ning smart
Corrodes and rankles in my breast! With fear
My heart pants thick; wildly my eyeballs roll;
Distraction drives my hurried steps a length
Of weary wand'ring; my ungovern'd tongue
Utters tumultuous ravings, that roll high
The floods of passion swoln with horrid woes.

PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Was it not wisdom's sovereign pow'r
That beam'd her brightest, purest flame,
T' illume her sage's soul the thought to frame (34),
And clothe with words his heav'n-taught lore?
" Whoe'er thou art, whom young desire
" Shall lead to Hymen's holy fire,
" Choose, from thy equals choose thy humble love:
" Let not the pomp of wealth allure thine eye,
" Nor high-trac'd lineage thy ambition move;
" Ill suits with low degree t' aspire so high."

ANTISTROPHE.

Never, O never may my fate
See me a splendid victim led

(34) This sage was Pittacus of Mitylene, one of the seven celebrated wise men of Greece.

To grace the mighty Jove's imperial bed,
Or share a god's magnific state.
When Iö's miseries meet my eyes,
What horrors in my soul arise!
Her virgin bosom, harb'ring high intent,
In man delights not, and his love disdains;
Hence the dire pest by wrathful Juno sent,
Her wide wild wand'rings hence, and agonizing pains.

EPODE.

Me less ambitious thoughts engage,
And love within my humbler sphere:
Hence my soul rests in peace secure from fear,
Secure from danger's threat'ning rage.
Me may the pow'rs that rule the sky
Ne'er view with love's resistless eye:
Ah! never be th' unequal conflict mine,
To strive with their inextricable love:
Might not my heart against itself combine?
Or how escape the pow'rful arts of Jove?

PROMETHEUS.

Yet shall this Jove, with all his self-will'd pride,
Learn humbler thoughts, taught by that fatal marriage,
Which from the lofty throne of sovereign rule
Shall sink him to a low and abject state,
And on his head fulfil his father's curse,
The curse of Saturn, vented in that hour
When from his ancient royalty he fell.
Of all the gods not one, myself except,
Can warn him of his fate, and how to shun
Th' impending ruin. I know all, and how.
Let him then sit, and glorying in his height
Roll with his red right hand his vollied thunder
Falsely secure, and wreath his bick'ring flames.

Yet nought shall they avail him, nor prevent
His abject and dishonourable fall.
Such rival adversary forms he now
Against himself, prodigious in his might,
And unassailable; whose rage shall roll
Flames that surpass his lightnings, fiercer bolts
That quash his thunders: and from Neptune's hand
Dash his trined mace, that from the bottom stirs
The troubled sea, and shakes the solid earth.
Crush'd with this dreadful ruin shall he learn
How different, to command, and to obey.

CHORUS.

Thy ominous tongue gives utterance to thy wish.

PROMETHEUS.

It is my wish, and shall be ratified.

CHORUS.

What, shall high Jove bend to a greater lord?

PROMETHEUS.

And to a yoke more galling stoop his neck.

CHORUS.

Dost thou not fear, vaunting this bold discourse?

PROMETHEUS.

What should I fear, by Fate exempt from death?

CHORUS.

But he may add fresh tortures to thy pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Let him then add them, I await them all.

CHORUS.

Wise they, who reverence the stern pow'r of vengeance.

PROMETHEUS.

Go then, with prompt servility fall down
Before your lord, fawn, cringe, and sue for grace.
For me, I value him at less than nothing.

Let him exert his brief authority,
And lord it whilst he may; his pow'r in Heav'n
Shall vanish soon, nor leave a trace behind.—
But see, his messenger hastes on amain,
Th' obsequious lackey of this new-made monarch:
He comes, I ween, the bearer of fresh tidings.

MERCURY, PROMETHEUS, CHORUS.

MERCURY.

To thee grown old in craft, deep drench'd in gall,
Disgustful to the gods, too prodigal
Of interdicted gifts to mortal man,
Thief of the fire of Heav'n, to thee my message.
My father bids thee say what nuptials these
Thy tongue thus vaunts as threat'ning his high pow'r;
And clearly say, couch'd in no riddling phrase,
Each several circumstance; propound not to me
Ambiguous terms, Prometheus; for thou seest
Jove brooks not such, unfit to win his favour.

PROMETHEUS.

Thou doest thy message proudly, in high terms,
Becoming well the servant of such lords.
Your youthful pow'r is new; yet vainly deem ye
Your high-rais'd tow'rs impregnable to pain:
Have I not seen two sovereigns (35) of the sky
Sink from their glorious state? And I shall see
A third, this present lord, with sudden ruin
Dishonourably fall. What, seem I now
To dread, to tremble at these new-rais'd gods?
That never shall their force extort from me.
Hence then, the way thou cam'st return with speed:

(35) Ouranus dethroned by his son Saturn, and Saturn by his son Jupiter.

Thy vain inquiries get no other answer.

MERCURY.

Such insolence before, so fiery fierce,
Drew on thy head this dreadful punishment.

PROMETHEUS.

My miseries, be assur'd, I would not change
For thy gay servitude, but rather choose
To live a vassal to this dreary rock,
Than lackey the proud heels of Jove. These words,
If insolent, your insolence extorts.

MERCURY.

I think thou art delighted with thy woes.

PROMETHEUS.

Delighted! Might I see mine enemies
Delighted thus! And thee I hold among them.

MERCURY.

And why blame me for thy calamities?

PROMETHEUS.

To tell thee in a word, I hate them all,
These gods; of them I deserv'd well, and they
Ungrateful and unjust work me these ills.

MERCURY.

Thy malady, I find, is no small madness.

PROMETHEUS.

If to detest my enemies be madness,
It is a malady I wish to have.

MERCURY.

Were it well with thee, who could brook thy pride?

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me!

MERCURY.

That sound of grief Jove doth not know.

PROMETHEUS.

Time, as its age advanceth, teaches all things.

MERCURY.

All its advances have not taught thee wisdom.

PROMETHEUS.

I should not else waste words on thee, a vassal.

MERCURY.

Nought wilt thou answer then to what Jove asks.

PROMETHEUS.

If due, I would repay his courtesy.

MERCURY.

Why am I check'd, why rated as a boy?

PROMETHEUS.

A boy thou art, more simple than a boy,
If thou hast hopes to be inform'd by me.
Not all his tortures, all his arts shall move me
T' unlock my lips, till this curs'd chain be loos'd.
No, let him hurl his flaming lightnings, wing
His whitening snows, and with his thunders shake
The rocking earth, they move not me to say
What force shall wrest the sceptre from his hand (36).

MERCURY.

Weigh these things well, will these unloose thy chains?

(36) It is not necessary to send the ladies to Pindar for their information in this celestial anecdote, as our courtly Lansdowne in his Mask of Peleus and Thetis is ready to discover the secret. Jupiter beheld the charms of Thetis, daughter of Oceanus, with the eye of a lover, and intended to advance her as his consort to the imperial throne of Heaven. Now it was in the Fates that this lady should have a son, who was to be greater than his father. Prometheus alone, by his divine foresight, could open the danger to Jupiter; but this he firmly refused to do, till he should be released from the rock. After that Hercules, by the permission of Jupiter, had killed the tormenting eagle, and unbound his chains, he disclosed the decree of the Fates: Thetis was given in marriage to Peleus, and the prophecy was accomplished in the famous Achilles.

PROMETHEUS.

Well have they long been weigh'd, and well consider'd.

MERCURY.

Subdue, vain fool, subdue thy insolence,
And let thy miseries teach thee juster thoughts.

PROMETHEUS.

Thy counsels, like the waves that dash against
The rock's firm base, disquiet but not move me.
Conceive not of me that, through fear what Jove
May in his rage inflict, my fix'd disdain
Shall e'er relent, e'er suffer my firm mind
To sink to womanish softness, to fall prostrate,
To stretch my supplicating hands, entreating
My hated foe to free me from these chains.
Far be that shame, that abject weakness from me.

MERCURY.

I see thou art implacable, unsoften'd
By all the mild entreaties I can urge;
But like a young steed rein'd, that proudly struggles,
And champs his iron curb, thy haughty soul
Abates not of its unavailing fierceness.
But pride, disdaining to be rul'd by reason,
Sinks weak and valueless. But mark me well,
If not obedient to my words, a storm,
A fiery and inevitable deluge
Shall burst in threefold vengeance on thy head.
First, his fierce thunder wing'd with lightning flames
Shall rend this rugged rock, and cover thee
With hideous ruin: long time shalt thou lie
Astonied in its rifted sides, till dragg'd
Again to light; then shall the bird of Jove,
The rav'ning eagle, lur'd with scent of blood,
Mangle thy body, and each day returning,

An uninvited guest, plunge his fell beak,
And feast and riot on thy black'ning liver.
Expect no pause, no respite, till some god
Comes to relieve thy pains, willing to pass
The dreary realms of ever-during night (37),
The dark descent of Tartarus profound.
Weigh these things well; this is no fiction drest
In vaunting terms, but words of serious truth.
The mouth of Jove knows not to utter falsehood,
But what he speaks is fate. Be cautious then,
Regard thyself; let not o'erweening pride
Despise the friendly voice of prudent counsel.

CHORUS.

Nothing amiss we deem his words, but fraught
With reason, who but wills thee to relax
Thy haughty spirit, and by prudent counsels
Pursue thy peace: be then advis'd; what shame
For one so wise to persevere in error?

PROMETHEUS.

All this I knew e'er he declar'd his message.
That enemy from enemy should suffer
Extreme indignity is nothing strange.
Let him then work his horrible pleasure on me;
Wreath his black curling flames, tempest the air
With vollied thunders and wild warring winds,
Rend from its roots the firm earth's solid base,
Heave from the roaring main its boisterous waves,
And dash them to the stars; me let him hurl,

(37) The scholiast explains this passage by saying, that whoever should attempt to succour Prometheus, and deliver him from his pain, should himself be sent to the shades of Orcus, and the dark abyss of Tartarus. The words are very remarkable; for want of a better explication of them, we must take up with this.

Caught in the fiery tempest, to the gloom
Of deepest Tartarus; not all his pow'r
Can quench th' ethereal breath of life in me.

MERCURY.

Such ravings, such wild counsels might you hear,
From moon-struck madness. What is this but madness?
Were he at ease, would he abate his phrensy?
But you, whose gentle hearts with social sorrow
Melt at his suff'rings, from this place remove,
Remove with speed, lest the tempestuous roar
Of his fierce thunder strike your souls with horror.

CHORUS.

To other themes, to other counsels turn
Thy voice, where pleaded reason may prevail:
This is ill urg'd, and may not be admitted.
Wouldst thou solicit me to deeds of baseness (38)?
Whate'er betides, with him will I endure it.
The vile betrayer I have learn'd to hate;
There is no fouler stain, my soul abhors it.

MERCURY.

Remember you are warn'd; if ill o'ertake you
Accuse not Fortune, lay not the blame on Jove,

(38) The Chorus throughout this tragedy find themselves in a very delicate and difficult situation. Consanguinity and affection brought them to the rock to commiserate the afflictions of Prometheus; hence they became interested in the action: as his sufferings were unjust, their office, which led them to favour the good, led them also to express their disapprobation of his punishment; but as it was inflicted by Jupiter, their piety and reverence would not permit them to oppose the king of gods; all that remained for them was to condole with him, to give him friendly counsel, and to soften his inflamed resentment: their character is preserved with wonderful propriety and decorum. Even at the last, when nothing could prevail with him to abate his implacable spirit, and Mercury with much tenderness advised them to retire, and avoid the impending storm, they answer with a becoming firmness, that they could not be guilty of such a deed of baseness; ancient manners, which considered the desertion of a friend as the vilest of actions, required this sacrifice of their own safety.

As by his hand sunk in calamities
Unthought of, unforeseen: no, let the blame
Light on yourselves; your folly not unwarn'd,
Not unawares, but 'gainst your better knowledge,
Involv'd you in th' inextricable toils.

PROMETHEUS.

He fables not; I feel in very deed
The firm earth rock; the thunder's deep'ning roar
Rolls with redoubled rage; the bick'ring flames
Flash thick; the eddying sands are whirl'd on high;
In dreadful opposition the wild winds
Rend the vex'd air; the boist'rous billows rise
Confounding sea and sky; th' impetuous storm
Rolls all its terrible fury on my head.
Seest thou this, awful Themis; and thou, Æther,
Through whose pure azure floats the general stream
Of liquid light, see you what wrongs I suffer!

THE SUPPLICANTS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

CHORUS, THE DAUGHTERS OF DANAUS.

DANAUS.

PELASGUS.

HERALD.

THE SUPPLICANTS.

THE fire and fury that rages through the former play, is agreeably contrasted, where perhaps the reader least expected it, with the sober spirit of the daughters of Danaus. These illustrious Supplicants are drawn indeed with a firmness of soul becoming their high rank, but tempered with a modest and amiable sensibility, and an interesting plaintiveness, that might have been a model even to the gentle and passionate Ovid; and that heart must have little of the fine feelings of humanity, that does not sympathize with their distress. The provident wisdom of their father Danaus, the calm but firm dignity of Pelasgus, the inviolable attachment to the laws of hospitality, the solemn sense of religion, and the chasteness of sentiment through the whole, must please every mind that is capable of being touched with the gracious simplicity of ancient manners.

The scene is near the shore, in an open grove close to the altar and images of the gods presiding

over the sacred games, with a view of the sea and the ships of Ægyptus on one side, and of the towers of Argos on the other; with hills, and woods, and vales, a river flowing between them; altogether with the persons of the drama forming a picture, that would have well employed the united pencils of Poussin and Claude Lorain.

THE SUPPLICANTS.

CHORUS (1).

PROTECTOR of the suppliant, gracious Jove,
Look with an eye of pity on this strain,
Which from the gentle depths of Nile have sped
Their naval enterprise. Those sacred fields,
That border on the Syrian wastes, we leave,
Not by the public voice of justice doom'd (2)

(1) Danaus, the fourth in descent from Iö, had fifty daughters; his brother Ægyptus had fifty sons. It was much for the interest of Ægyptus to unite the the families and the kingdoms, by marrying his sons to the daughters of his brother; but the proposal, which was urged with such violence and rudeness, was so disagreeable to Danaus and his female train, that they sailed from the mouth of the Nile, and sought refuge on the coast of Greece, where we find them just arrived.

(2) The laws of ancient Greece were severe, not sanguinary, till Draco; they permitted even the murderer to atone for his crime by banishment, which often was voluntary, sometimes the punishment inflicted by the state; there are many instances in Homer; in Statius Tydeus, stained with a brother's blood, fled a voluntary exile to the court of Adrastus: hence the Furies, declaring their office to Minerva, tell her

'Tis ours to drive the murderer from the house.

Tyndarus, in the Electra of Euripides, urges this strongly against Orestes,

Deaf to the call of justice he infring'd
The firm authority of the public laws;
For when beneath my daughter's murdering axe

For blood, but willing fugitives from youths
Too near allied, whose impious love would raise
Perforce the nuptial bed by us abhorr'd;
Sons of Ægyptus they. Our father Danaus,
On whose authority we build our counsels,
And strengthen our abhorrence, plann'd these measures,
And wrought us to this honourable toil,
To wing our swift flight o'er the billowy main,
And reach the shores of Argos (3), whence we draw
Our vaunted lineage, from the embrace of Jove
Enamour'd of that virgin, whom transform'd
The tort'ring sting drove wand'ring o'er the world.
To what more friendly region can we take
Our progress, bearing in our suppliant hands
These peaceful branches crown'd with sacred wreaths (4)?

The royal Agamemnon bow'd his head,
He ought to have call'd the laws, the righteous laws,
T' avenge the blood, and by appeal to them
Have driven his mother from this princely mansion:
Thus 'midst his ills calm reason had borne rule,
Justice had held its course, and he been righteous.

(3) We have here indubitable marks of a colony moving from Ægypt to settle in Greece; and as these emigrants came forward under the auspices of their tutelary Isis, we might well expect to find the symbol of that goddess. The national vanity of the Grecians was hurt to see these strangers give birth to an illustrious line of kings and heroes, whose glory eclipsed that of their own Autocthones; but their lively imagination soon found a remedy for this; it created a daughter from their Inachus, dressed her out with every charm that might engage the love of Jupiter, transmuted the symbolical into a real heifer, and sent her into Ægypt, there to bring forth the famous Epaphus. Now these emigrants might be received with a good grace, as being originally of Argive extraction; and Greece, in return for a colony, gratuitously presented Ægypt with a goddess.

(4) It was usual for supplicants to stretch forth in their hands branches of olive bound with wreaths of wool; see the Furies, p. 393. v. ult. Euripides expresses this by ἱκτῆρι θαλλῷ. So Virgil,

Et vittâ comptos voluit prætendere ramos. Æn. 8. v. 128.

The olive was an emblem of peace, and Servius tells us, that its branches were

Ye royal tow'rs, thou earth, and ye fair streams
Of orient crystal, ye immortal gods
In the high heav'ns enthron'd, ye awful pow'rs
That deep beneath hold your tremendous seats,
Jove the preserver, guardian of the roof
Where dwells the pious man, receive your suppliants,
Breathe o'er these realms your favourable spirit,
And form them to receive this female train!
But for those men, that proud injurious band
Sprung from Ægyptus, e'er they fix their foot
On this moist shore, drive them into the deep,
With all their flying streamers and quick oars,
There let them meet the whirlwind's boist'rous rage,
Thund'rings, and lightnings, and the furious blasts
That harrow up the wild tempestuous waves,
And perish in the storm, e'er they ascend
Our kindred bed, and seize against our will
What nature and the laws of blood deny (5).

To thee, th' avenging pow'r
Ador'd beyond the waves of this wide main,
Raise we the solemn strain,
Her progeny, that cropp'd each various flow'r
Which deck'd the fragrant mead,
Till Jove's soft touch her alter'd shape caress'd,
And sooth'd her soul to rest:

bound with wool, the lamb being the gentlest of animals, to show the weak and defenceless state of the presenter.

(5) There does not appear to be any thing in nature, or in the customs of antiquity, to hinder marriages within this line of consanguinity. When Pelasgus asks these supplicants whether their laws forbid such alliances, they answer evasively; this allegation must therefore be considered only as an oratorical exaggeration.

Thereto we add thy fate-appointed name,
Epaphus of mighty fame,
To thee we raise the strain, while now we tread
Thy reverenc'd mother's fertile soil,
And record each various toil;
Now shall each trace to light be brought,
Though far surpassing human thought;
Now shall the wondrous tale unfold,
Mysterious deeds of times of old.

Dwells in this land some augur near?
If these sad wailings reach his ear,
Will he not deem the mournful note
Warbled from Philomela's throat,
Such time as from the falcon's wing
She leaves her fav'rite haunt and spring,
And o'er her nest, and o'er her young
Attunes her sweetest, saddest song,
And in the melancholy strain
Laments the fate of Itys slain;
In sullen rage the mother stands,
And in her son's blood bathes her hands.
In notes so sweet, so sad, I try
To raise th' Ionian harmony;
And rend these cheeks, that ripening drew
On Nile's warm banks their vermeil hue;
Whilst at each solemn, pensive pause
My bursting heart the deep sigh draws,
And, wo-betroth'd, fears e'en its friends,
If yet perchance one friend attends,
For that our sails the deep explore,
Leaving our native dusky shore.

Ye gods, from whom we proudly trace
The glories of our high-born race,
Hear us, ye pow'rs, propitious hear,
And show that justice is your care;
Guard in our just, our holy cause
The sanctity of nature's laws;
You, that abhor each impious deed,
Arise, protect the nuptial bed.
When Mars to slaughter gives the reins (6),
And rages o'er th' ensanguin'd plains,
To each that flies the altar gives
A refuge, and the suppliant lives,
For Jove, with pious pray'rs ador'd,
Commands stern war to drop the sword.

Jove's firm decree, though wrapt in night,
Beams 'midst the gloom a constant light;
Man's fate obscure in darkness lies,
Not to be pierc'd by mortal eyes:
The just resolves of his high mind
A glorious consummation find;
Though in majestic state enthron'd
Thick clouds and dark enclose him round
As from the tow'r of heav'n his eye
Surveys bold man's impiety;
Till, his ripe wrath on vengeance bent,

(6) There is a difficulty in the original, owing probably to a corrupted text, which no annotator has yet cleared; the general idea is very obvious, supplicants fly for protection to the altars of the gods, which afford refuge even in the violence of war. Plutarch expresses the same sentiment, ἔςι δούλῳ φέυξιμος ϐωμὸς· καὶ πολεμίους φεύγοντες, ἂν ἀγάλματος λάϐωνται ἢ ναοῦ, θαρροῦσιν. De Superstitione. It is well known how impious it was held by the Grecians to offer violence to those who had sate as supplicants at their altars.

He arms each god for punishment (7),
And from his high and holy throne
Sends all his awful judgements down.
And may his eye our wrongs survey,
Mark'd by insulting man his prey;
As each bold youth by passion fir'd
Against our bosom-peace conspir'd,
And to deceit's smooth influence
Join'd rude and boist'rous violence:
An infant forest these, that shoot
Their wild growth from one parent root,
And o'er our fresh bloom strive to spread
Their cheerless and malignant shade.
Thus I attune my notes of wo,
And bid the varied measures flow;
Now the shrilling descant chase,
Now solemn sink the deep'ning base;
Thus bid the warbled cadence 'plain,
And steep in tears the mournful strain;
A strain to grace my obsequies,
Whilst yet I view yon golden skies.

Ye rising hills that crown this shore,
Where Apis reign'd in years of yore,
Propitious hear me, nor disdain
To let your echoes learn this strain;

(7) This sense arises from the plain and literal construction of the text; sententia est optima, and every attempt to alter it has only tortured it into obscurity.

This alludes to the solemn lamentations, the θρηνωδίαι, chanted by their friends at the funerals of the deceased. Milton, that exact observer of ancient manners, makes his Chorus break out into one of these mournful songs on the news of Samson's death, till Manoa checks them, thinking it more prudent to bury his son with silent obsequies.

Barbaric though my voice and rude,
Well may its notes be understood;
Barbaric though this purfled stole (8),
Frounc'd around with linen roll,
This blushing veil though Sidon gave,
Ye hills of Apis hear, and save!

The vow perform'd the gods aton'd,
The pious rites with blessings crown'd,
Death distant waits with slacken'd pace,
Nor dares profane the sacred place.
But will he now his foot repress?
Will the kind gods their votary bless?
Ah me! these swelling waves of wo,
Whither, ah! whither will they flow?

Ye rising hills that crown this shore,
Where Apis reign'd in years of yore,

(8) The scholiast, following the usual interpretation of the word, explains ξὺν λακίδι by rending their robes, and, amidst the silence of the other annotators, he has the sanction of the learned Mr. Heath. This was a deed expressive of the last despair; we have an instance of this in the siege of Thebes; and in the Persians, when Xerxes rends his robes, we hear of it enough, it completes the distress of his mother, and even of his father's shade; but in all these places the word used is either ἐρέικω, or ῥήγνυμι: an author is the best commentator on himself; wherever λακὶς is used by Æschylus, it signifies what the Latin language expresses by lacinia, and the English by lace or fringe: Persæ, l. 837. where this idea of rending the ornaments of dress is intended to be conveyed, στημοῤῥαγῦσι is added to λακίδες. The Chorus here are not in a desperate situation; they had escaped from their prosecutors, were safely landed in Greece, and had hopes of protection from the gods, to whose altars they were fled, and from the generous inhabitants of the Apian land, to which they address themselves for favour, though their voice and dress be barbaric, that is, shows them to be of a foreign country. Pelasgus speaks of them as

Gorgeously vested in barbaric stoles,
That float in many a fold;

where the word χλίουτα will not admit the idea of this supposed dilaceration.

Propitious hear me, nor disdain
To let your echoes learn this strain;
Barbaric though my voice and rude,
Well may its notes be understood;
Barbaric though this purfled stole,
Frounc'd around with linen roll:
This blushing veil though Sidon gave,
Ye hills of Apis hear, and save!

The dashing oar, the swelling sail,
That caught the favourable gale,
Safe from the storms, nor I complain,
Wafted our frail bark o'er the main.
All-seeing sovereign Sire, defend,
And guide us to a prosp'rous end;
Save us, O save the seed divine
Of our great mother's sacred line;
From man's rude touch O save us free,
And help insnared chastity!

Thou, virgin daughter of high Jove,
A virgin's vows hear, and approve;
Holding thy sober, awful state,
Protect us from the touch we hate;
From bold incontinence secure,
Pure thyself, preserve us pure;
Save us, O save the seed divine
Of our great mother's sacred line;
From man's rude touch O save us free,
And help insnared chastity!

If not, this glowing train, that trace
From Heav'n's high King their high-born race,

Shall voluntary victims go
To th' all-receiving realms below;
To their dread gods for refuge fly,
If Heav'n's high pow'rs their aid deny.

O sovereign Jove, shall wrath divine
For Iö still pursue her line?
Still thy dread queen in fury rise,
And in her cause arm all the skies?
She wings these winds, this tempest spreads,
That bursts in vengeance o'er our heads.
O sovereign Jove, for this thy ear
No meed of grateful voice shall hear;
Thy son dishonour'd, whom of yore
To thee disfigur'd Iö bore.
Turn then, O turn thy gracious eye,
And hear us from thy throne on high!

DANAUS, CHORUS.

DANAUS.

Daughters, this hour demands your utmost prudence;
Your father's care, your old and faithful pilot,
Hath held your helm safe o'er the dangerous deep;
Behoves you now at land with provident heed
To form your counsels, and attentive mark
My words. Yon cloud of dust, though tongueless, speaks
An army nigh; I hear their wheels of brass
Loud rattling on their axles; now I view
Chariots and horse distinct, and shields, and spears
Far gleaming o'er the plain; the lords perchance
That rule these realms, inform'd of our arrival,
Advance to us; but bring they minds of peace,

Guiltless of violence, or with ruthless rage
Rush on this train, best sit together, virgins,
Around this altar, sacred to the gods (9)
Presiding o'er the games: a surer refuge
Than tow'r or shield war-proof an altar gives.
Go then with speed, and reverent in your hands
Hold forth these supplicating branches crown'd
With snowy wreaths, ensigns of awful Jove.
With modest, grave, and decent speech receive
These strangers, as beseems the wretched state
Of unknown supplicants; declare at once
Distinct and brief the motives of your flight
Unstain'd with blood: let not your roving eye
Dart the bold glance, impeaching modesty.
Be not thy voice heard first, nor let its answers
Weary their ear; they quickly take offence;
Submissive urge thy plea, rememb'ring well
The pride of words ill suits thy low estate,
A fugitive, a stranger, in distress.

CHORUS.

Wise are thy counsels, and with reverend heed
Shall be remember'd, father; and may Jove,
The author of our race, look gracious on us.

DANAUS.

Quick be his aid, strong guardian of our cause.

(9) These gods were Jupiter as presiding over the Olympic games, Neptune as over the Isthmian, Apollo as institutor of the Pythian.

Instituit sacros celebri certamine ludos,
Pythia de domiti serpentis nomine dictos. Ov. Met.

And Mercury, who taught the graceful exercises of the palæstra,

Qui feros cultus hominum recentum
Voce formasti catus, et decore
More palæstræ.

CHORUS.

Thus near I choose my seat.

DANAUS.

Supreme of gods,
Pity our suff'rings, pity ere we perish.

CHORUS.

Look with an eye of mercy on thy suppliants,
Impart thy grace, and bless us with success.

DANAUS.

Address you now this crested bird of Jove (10).

CHORUS.

Thee, radiant Sun, thy tutelary rays
Streaming with gold, sacred Apollo, god
Once exil'd from the skies, to thee I call (11),
Look on our woes, and pity wretched mortals.

DANAUS.

O succour us, assist us, gracious pow'r.

CHORUS.

Whom of these gods, whom yet shall we invoke?

DANAUS.

Mark you this trident? It declares the god.

(10) The image of Neptune is characterized by his Trident, which plainly declares the God; but this adjunct of Apollo is not so clear: Pausanias tells us, that the Grecians worshipped the Cock as sacred to Apollo, because he announces the rising of the sun. But farther than this, they drew their auguries of success from this bird: thus the Bœotians formed a joyful presage of their glorious victory over the Lacedæmonians at Leuctra, from the crowing of the cocks during all the preceding night; for the cock, when he has conquered his rival, proclaims his victory with loud and cheerful crowings; but if conquered, he hides himself in silence.—Verderii imagines deorum. See also Cicero de Divinatione. 1 L. xxxv.

(11) This is well put. Apollo was fabled to have been banished from heaven, because he killed the thunder-forging Cyclopes.

CHORUS.

Safe hast thou brought us o'er the swelling sea,
Receive us then, and save us on the shore.

DANAUS.

This, in the Grecian rites, is Mercury (12).

CHORUS.

Nothing but good announce thou to the free.

DANAUS.

This common altar, sacred to these gods,
Approach with awe; the ground is holy; sit
Like turtles trembling at the falcon's flight,
The winged foe of all the winged race,
Polluter of his kind; for how can bird,
That preys on bird, be pure? Or how can man,
That from th' unwilling father drags to marriage
Th' unwilling daughter, how can he be chaste?
Or shall the haughty deed e'en after death
Escape unpunish'd in the realms below?
No: for another Jove (13), they say, holds there
His awful seat, and to the guilty dead
Awards just vengeance. But be wary, try
The sanctity of the place; and may it bring
The blessing of success to crown your hopes.

(12) Danaus does well to explain this image to his daughters; for in the Ægyptian rites Mercury was depicted with his caduceus and talaria indeed, but with the head of a dog, as the latrator Anubis.

(13) Not only the heavens, but the sea, and even the infernal regions had each their Jupiter; wherefore this god had an image among the Argives with three eyes, to denote his power over those three regions, which the ancient mythology has divided between the three sons of Saturn.—Verderius from Pausanias.

PELASGUS, DANAUS, CHORUS.

PELASGUS.

What female train address we here, and whence,
Gorgeously vested in barbaric stoles
That float in many a fold? Our Argos sees not
Her daughters thus array'd, nor Greece through all
Its states. That thus without some previous herald,
The public hospitality not ask'd,
Without safe conduct, you have boldly ventur'd
To land upon our coasts, this is most strange.
Only these boughs, as supplicants are wont,
You lay before these gods that o'er the games
Preside: hence Greece forms one conjecture only,
Of all besides uncertain what to think,
Till your distinct relation clears our doubts.

CHORUS.

As to our habits, thy remarks are just.
But how should I address thee? as a man
Of private station, or with hallow'd charge
Presiding here, or chieftain of the state?

PELASGUS.

Nay, answer me, and speak with confidence.
Pelasgus bids you, sovereign of this land:
My sire Palæthon, of high ancestry
Original with this earth: from me, their king,
The people take their name, and boast themselves
Pelasgians. O'er a wide extent of land,
Through which the Algus flows, and Strymon west,
From the Perrhæbians o'er the sacred heights
Of Pindus, to Pœonia, and beyond
The mountains of Dodona, spacious realms,

My empire stretches, bounded by the sea
This way. In ancient times the Apian plains
From Apis drew their honour'd name, the son
Of Phœbus, in his father's healing arts
Skill'd: from Naupactus came the heav'n-taught sage
And clear'd the land of that pestiferous brood (14),
Which the moist earth, foul with corrupted gore,
Of old engender'd, fierce with dragon-rage,
A cruel neighbourhood; their horrible pride
The matchless Apis quell'd, and freed the land
Of Argos. Hence in sacred reverence
We hold his memory. Instructed thus
Say on, declare your race, and aught besides:
But know we brook not the long pomp of words.

CHORUS.

Brief will I be, and plain. Of Argive race
We boast ourselves, and draw our vaunted lineage
From her, the lowing mother, in her son
Supremely blest. All this my words shall prove.

PELASGUS.

Unplausible your tale. Can it be, strangers,
That you're of Argive race? Liker, I ween,
The Libyan damsels, in no wise resembling (15)

(14) We have in this history clear traces of another colony from Ægypt, whose chieftain Apis drove out the barbarous remains of the Ophite race.

(15) The ladies of ancient Greece, like the fair females that grace our happy country, were remarkable for that soft and delicate composition of colour, which consists of a fine red beautifully intermixed and incorporated with white: when Pelasgus therefore observed the glowing tints of these dames, he pronounces them not of Argive race, but readily derives them from some warmer clime. Mr. Addison, in his Cato, has expressed the same idea in these charming lines,

The glowing dames of Zama's royal court
Have faces flush'd with more exalted charms:
The sun, that rolls his chariot o'er their heads,
Works up more fire and colour in their cheeks.

Our daughters: such perchance the Nile might rear,
Such in the glowing tint the artist's hand
Might mark the Colchian dame; and such, I hear,
The wand'ring Indians, mounted on their camels,
Along the tented plains out-stretching wide
To Æthiopia's cities; such the troops
Of warlike Amazons; and were your hands
Arm'd with the polish'd bow, I might conjecture
You were of these; therefore I thirst to know
More fully, how you are of Argive race.

CHORUS.

Fame speaks of Iö, in this Argive land
The sacred guardian of the fane of Juno.
Her, as the common voice loudly reports——

PELASGUS.

Reports it that the Thunderer, of her charms
Enamour'd, with a mortal mix'd the god?

CHORUS.

And met in secret shades, conceal'd from Juno.

PELASGUS.

How ended then the bickerings of these pow'rs?

CHORUS.

The Argive queen transform'd her to a heifer.

PELASGUS.

Does Jove approach her in this fair-horn'd shape?

CHORUS.

Himself, they say, transforming to a bull.

PELASGUS.

What angry measures form'd his royal consort?

CHORUS.

A herdsman she assign'd starr'd round with eyes.

PELASGUS.

What herdsman this, and how starr'd round with eyes?

CHORUS.

The earth-born Argus: but him Hermes slew.

PELASGUS.

What new device to vex the wretched heifer?

CHORUS.

A winged pest, arm'd with a horrid sting:
Those on the banks of Nile call it the bryze.

PELASGUS.

And drove her in long wand'rings from this land.

CHORUS.

Thy words, according well, speak this for me.

PELASGUS.

Reach'd she Canobus, and the walls of Memphis?

CHORUS.

There Jove with gentle hand sooth'd her to rest;
There planted his illustrious progeny.

PELASGUS.

Who from this heifer boasts his race divine?

CHORUS.

Hence Epaphus receiv'd his name; from him
Libya, whose fair domains extended wide.

PELASGUS.

What other branch sprung from this mighty root?

CHORUS.

Belus, the father of two sons; my sire,
Behold, is one.

PELASGUS.

Declare the sage's name.

CHORUS.

Danaus: his brother, whom by name they call
Ægyptus, is the sire of fifty sons.
Thus have I shown thee our high ancestry;
Protect us then, support an Argive train.

PELASGUS.

You seem indeed to draw your origin
Of old from hence: but say, how have you dar'd
To leave your father's house? What chance constrain'd you?

CHORUS.

King of Pelasgia, various are the ills (16)
Of mortal man; and never mayst thou see
Misfortune mounting on the self-same wing.
Who would have thought we should have wing'd our flight
Thus unexpected to the coast of Argos,
Allied of old, amazement in our van,
And strong abhorrence of the nuptial bed!

PELASGUS.

Why, say'st thou, fly you to these gods for refuge,
Holding these fresh-cropt branches crown'd with wreaths?

CHORUS.

That to the offspring of Ægyptus we
Might not be slaves.

PELASGUS.

Whence this reluctance, say,
From hate? Or do your laws forbid such nuptials?

CHORUS.

And who would wish to make their friends their lords?

PELASGUS.

Yet thus the strength of families gains force.

(16) The address of these virgins here deserves our attention: their father, knowing the quick and volatile temper of the Grecians, had warned them not to let their answers weary the ear; Pelasgus had given them the same admonition; hence the Chorus says, "brief will I be, and plain;" and thus far indeed all her replies have a modest brevity and precision; here a trying question had been put to her, which could not be evaded; but as her success depended on the reception her answer should meet with, she awakes the attention of the king by a fine moral sentiment, and having thus prepared his mind, gives him a direct answer by applying the force of it to her own case. There is exquisite art in this.

CHORUS.

And to the wretched, death is not unwelcome.

PELASGUS.

In what would you engage my honour to you?

CHORUS.

Not to enthrall us to Ægyptus' sons,
Should they demand us.

PELASGUS.

Arduous is the task
Thou wouldst enjoin me, to provoke new wars.

CHORUS.

O'er him that succours, Justice holds her shield.

PELASGUS.

If from the first the cause were my concern.

CHORUS.

Revere these gods, the guardians of your state,
Encircled with this supplicating train.

PELASGUS.

Struck with religious horror I behold
These branches shade this consecrated seat.

CHORUS.

Dread then the wrath of Jove, who guards the suppliant.
Son of Palæcthon, hear me; with a heart
Prompt to relieve, king of Pelasgia, hear.
Behold me supplicant, an exile, wand'ring,
Like the poor lamb, that on the craggy steep
Raises her mournful voice, secure of help,
And warns her faithful keeper of her danger.

PELASGUS.

I see a stranger train, with boughs new-pluck'd
Shading these gods that o'er the games preside.
May their arrival, though now strangers here,
Yet hence descended, bring no dread event;

Nor from this sudden, unexpected hap
Let war, which least we wish, disturb our state.

CHORUS.

May Themis, guardian of the suppliant, sprung
From pow'rful Jove, look on our harmless flight.
Nor from a younger let thy age disdain
To learn the reverence due to supplicants,
From whose pure hands the fav'ring gods accept
The grateful offering.

PELASGUS.

Make not your request
To me in private; if pollution stains
The public state, the public has the charge
To expiate that stain; nor can my voice,
Ere consultation with the people held,
Warrant the sanction of the public faith.

CHORUS.

Thou art the state; the public thou; thy voice,
Superior to control, confirms the sanction
This altar gives; thy sole authority,
High-sceptred monarch of a sovereign throne,
Is here obey'd: religion's voice pleads for us;
Revere it, nor profane these hallow'd seats.

PELASGUS.

That profanation to mine enemies.
To grant you my protection cannot be
But with much danger; to reject your pray'rs,
Humanity forbids: perplex'd I fear
To act, or not to act, and fix my choice.

CHORUS.

On Heav'n's high throne he sits, whose watchful eye
Regards th' afflicted, when unfeeling pride
Denies that justice which the law asks for them.

Reverence his pow'r; for when the sufferer groans
With pangs unpitied, the fix'd wrath of Jove,
Protector of the suppliant, burns severe

PELASGUS.

If by your country's laws Ægyptus' sons,
As next of blood, assert a right in you,
Who should oppose them? It behoves thee then
By your own laws to prove such claim unjust (17).

CHORUS.

Ah! never may I be perforce a thrall
To man! By heav'n-directed flight I break
The wayward plan of these detested nuptials.
Arm justice on thy side, and with her aid
Judge with that sanctity the gods demand.

PELASGUS.

No easy province: make not me your judge.
Great though my pow'r, it is not mine to act (18),
I told thee so, without my people's voice

(17) There is great propriety in this plea, to which Pelasgus was naturally led by Grecian ideas, arising from the laws of that country, where orphan virgins were to marry their nearest of kin, and such were ordered to take them to wife.

Lex est, ut orbæ, qui sint genere proximi,
Eis nubant: et illos ducere eadem hæc lex jubet.—
TER. PHORM.

(18) The Athenians, and indeed all the states of Greece, were animated with the noblest and most generous spirit of liberty, and the strongest abhorrence of a tyrant; for by that name they denoted the man who had usurped the supreme power, and turned the free democracy into a monarchy.

Non quia crudelis ille, sed quoniam grave
Omne insuetis onus.

Nay, proud as they were of their own ancient kings, they could not bear to allow them a power inconsistent with their free laws, the right which every citizen claimed of giving his voice in the public council, and adding his sanction to the measures which the king was to carry into execution, only in obedience to the will of the people. We have many instances of this generous enthusiasm.

Assenting; lest, if ill arise, they say
By honouring strangers thou' hast undone thy country.

CHORUS.

Each equally allied, impartial Jove
Weighs each in equal balance; but repays
The impious deed with vengeance, to the just
Rewards their sanctity. Why griev'st thou then
To emulate the god, and act with justice?

PELASGUS.

Matter of high import hast thou propos'd,
Which not admits heady and fitful rashness,
But deep deliberation, provident care,
Wisely attentive to the general weal,
That hence no evil rise, but the event
Be prosp'rous found, first, to the state and me;
Next, that no force arrest you here, nor we
Betray you refug'd in these hallow'd seats,
The hostages of Heav'n, and on our heads
Call ruin and the vengeance of the gods,
That e'en in death acquits not. Seems not this
Matter of deep debate, and public care?

CHORUS.

Deliberate then with prudent care:
To thy counsels take with thee
Heav'n-commercing piety,
And be steadfast justice near.
Hark! methinks I hear them say,
Do not, mighty king, betray
Wretched exiles wand'ring far.
See me not with ruffian hand,
Refug'd at this shrine, profan'd,
Learn what boist'rous man may dare.

See me not with ruffled vest (19)
Rent unseemly from my breast,
Loose my tresses waving round,
Bridled with this golden brede,
Led, like a reluctant steed,
From the gods that guard this ground.
See each hallow'd image here,
And the awful pow'rs revere:
At thy feet thy suppliant laid,
Mighty monarch, hear and aid!
And know, to thee, thy house, thy rising race
Impartial justice shall repay the deed;
With glory's radiant crown thy virtues grace,
And righteous Jove shall sanctify the meed.

PELASGUS.

Well; I have paus'd, and ponder'd; but each thought
Tells me the fluctuating tide perforce
Will drive me on a war with these, or those;
And, like a ship with all its anchors out,
I must abide the storm: nor will this end
Without calamity, and loss, and wo.
When the rich house in desolation sinks,
Its wealth all wasted, bounteous Jove may raise
Its splendor to outshine its former state:
Or when the haughty tongue unseemly bolts
The bitter taunt that stings the anguish'd heart,
The balm of honied words may heal the wound.
But kindred blood to reek upon the dust—
No: let the altars blaze, and each due rite

(19) This passage confirms the observations on the word λεπτὰς in the former ode. Mr. Heath here translates πολυμίτων πέπλων by peplorum multis liciis textorum: and indeed these ladies seem to have been elegantly dressed, and to be conscious enough of it.

Propitiate ev'ry god t'avert the ill.
Meanwhile I keep aloof, wishing t'appear
Ignorant of these disputes: and may th'event
Be fortunate beyond my expectation.

CHORUS.

Hear the last words of desperate modesty.

PELASGUS.

Have I not heard? Speak on, I will attend.

CHORUS.

Seest thou these braided zones that bind our robes?

PELASGUS.

Ornaments these that suit your female state.

CHORUS.

Know then the honest purpose these shall serve.

PELASGUS.

What would thy words intend? Explain thyself.

CHORUS.

If honour shall not guard this female train—

PELASGUS.

How can these binding zones secure your safety?

CHORUS.

Hanging new trophies on these images.

PELASGUS.

Mysterious are thy words; speak plainly to me.

CHORUS.

To tell thee plainly then, I mean ourselves.

PELASGUS.

I hear the language of an anguish'd heart.

CHORUS.

Be sure of that: I speak our firm resolves.

PELASGUS.

On ev'ry side inevitable ills

Surround me, like a flood, whose dang'rous surge
Drives me into a vast and gulfy sea,
Where no kind harbour shelters from the storm.
Should I not yield you refuge, thou hast nam'd
A deed of horror not to be surpass'd:
If with Ægyptus' sons, whose veins are rich
With kindred blood, before our walls I try
The chance of war, what else, but bitter loss
Can be th' event, when in a woman's cause
Men shed their warm blood on th' embattled plain?
Yet strong constraint compels me to revere
The wrath of Jove, whose hospitable pow'r
Protects the suppliant, awfully severe.
And thou, age-honour'd father of these virgins,
Take in thy hands these boughs, place them with speed
On other altars of our country gods;
That all the citizens may see the signs
Of your arrival; but of me be sure
Speak not a word: for this free people love
To tax authority with blame. Some eye
Perchance may melt with pity, and abhor
The boist'rous force of these injurious men;
Hence shall you find more favour from the people;
For nature prompts to succour the distress'd.

DANAUS.

This reverend, this benevolent regard
To strangers we receive with grateful honour.
But from thy train send with me some t' attend,
To guide me to the altars of your gods,
The guardians of your state, and to their shrines,
With safety through your streets; for much unlike
Our form, our garb to yours; nor does our Nile
See on its banks a race like those that tread

The verdant borders of your Inachus:
Hence insolence may dare the rude affront;
The stranger friend by the friend's hand has bled.

PELASGUS.

Attend him; he says well; conduct his steps
Safe to the sacred shrines, seats of the gods,
Within our walls; and, as you pass, avoid
Much talk with those you meet, guiding this stranger,
Who claims protection from our hallow'd altars.

PELASGUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

For him thou hast order'd well; safe may he go
Appointed thus: but what becomes of me?
What shall I do? How wilt thou calm my fears?

PELASGUS.

Leave here those boughs, the ensigns of your toils.

CHORUS.

I leave them as thy voice and hand directs.

PELASGUS.

Seest thou that unfenc'd grove? Take shelter there (20).

CHORUS.

How should th' unconsecrated grove protect me?

PELASGUS.

Let them have wings, we leave you not their prey.

CHORUS.

Than winged dragons they're more dreadful to us.

(20) The sacred groves were enclosed; the Chorus therefore properly asks what protection an unconsecrated grove could afford: the answer shows, that the state would defend them, and they needed not that hallowed asylum; yet as the danger came upon them before they could be removed by a decree of the state, they fled for refuge to the sacred grove.

PELASGUS.

With better omens be thy words auspicious (21).

CHORUS.

No marvel if my mind sinks with its fears.

PELASGUS.

But a king's fear is ominous of ill.

CHORUS.

Be all thy words, be all thy actions happy!

PELASGUS.

Your father will not long be absent from you;
Meanwhile will I persuade th' assembled people,
If haply I may move them, to receive you
With gen'rous pity: him will I instruct
How best t' address his speech. Await th' event,
And supplicate the gods, whose guardian pow'r
Is worshipp'd here, to grant your hearts' warm wish.
This done, I will return; and may persuasion
Attend me, and good fortune speed my steps.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Might of the mighty, king of kings,
Supremely blest amidst the blest above,
Enthron'd in glory, righteous Jove,
From whom perfection to the perfect springs,

(21) It is well known that the ancients were very superstitious with regard to well or ill-omened words. Tully gives us some curious recitals in his book on divination. Nothing can be more inauspicious than a winged dragon; the mention of it was therefore of ill omen: the Chorus excuse themselves as being depressed with *fear;* this was another ill-omened word, especially when addressed to a king; they recover themselves with this auspicious wish, Be all thy words, be all thy actions happy; which shows that ἔυφρανε cannot be taken actively for animum mihi exhilera.

Hear us, O hear our fond request,
To pity melt each gen'rous breast;
View this bold outrage with indignant eye,
And shield us from the injury:
O'ertake their proud bark on the purple main,
Sink it with all its sable train;
Our female band with pity view,
And think from whose rich blood our honour'd race we drew.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

If Argive Iö's blooming grace
Could e'er thy fond enamour'd bosom move
To warm desire, and rapt'rous love,
The pleasing memory of her charms retrace.
From her our race divine we boast,
Not foreign to this Argive coast.
Her foot, in times of old, where now we tread,
Trod the flow'r-enamell'd mead;
And made with lowings loud the forests ring,
As from the bryze's tort'ring sting
O'er many a realm she wander'd wide,
And dar'd the bounding waves, that world from world divide (22).

STROPHE 2.

Found her foot rest on Asia's shore,
On pastoral Phrygia's, or on Lydia's plains,
Or Mysian Teuthra's wide domains?
Wildly Cilicia's rugged mountains o'er,
Pamphylia's various tribes among,
Each ceaseless-flowing stream along,

(22) Alluding to the passage of the Bosphorus, which divides Europe from Asia.

Through corn-clad fields, and valleys ever green,
The hallow'd haunts of beauty's queen,
That winged pest impell'd her foot to rove,
To the divine, all fost'ring grove,
Through whose rich meads, impregn'd with snow (23),
Temper'd with torrid beams Nile's healthful waters flow.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

The race that then possess'd the land,
Struck with astonishment and pale affright,
Beheld the strange, prodigious sight:
Disdaining to be touch'd she trod the strand,
The likeness of the lowing race
Now soft'ning sweet to virgin grace (24):
They saw, and trembled. All her toils at last,
Her wand'rings wild, her tortures past,
What gentle hand—eternal Lord 'twas thine;
Thy gentle hand, thy pow'r divine (25)
Sooth'd, softly sooth'd her frantic fear,
And from her glowing cheek wip'd sorrow's modest tear.

(23) The most ancient opinion was, that the Nile proceeded from the snow dissolving in the mountains of the Upper Æthiopia; this is mentioned by Anaxagoras, Æschylus, and Euripides. "Than the waters whereof there is none "more sweet; being not unpleasantly cold, and of all others the most wholesome. "Confirmed by that answer of Pescennius Niger to his murmuring soldiers, "What? crave you wine, when you have the Nilus to drink of? Such is it "in being so concocted by the sun, at all times in some part directly over it; "and by length of course, running from south to north (besides in ambages) "above one and forty degrees, &c." SANDYS.

(24) The poet here, by taking Iö under her change from the heifer to her own natural form, has given us the precise image of the Ægyptian Isis, who was represented as a most elegant woman with lunar horns on her head.—See Verder, Mr. Bryant, and particularly Histoire du Ciel.

(25) Jupiter restored Iö to her former shape, and with his gentle hand soothed her to peace: hence their illustrious son had the name of Epaphus, ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπαφῆς.

EPODE.

Now thy pleasing force employ,
All be love, and all be joy.
Rising from the sweet embrace,
Worthy of his radiant race,
Smiles the auspicious boy.
Time prepares to stamp his name
Glorious in the roll of fame;
Earth, through ev'ry raptur'd scene,
Hails th'ethereal son of Jove.
Who could charm Heav'n's angry queen?
Who her hostile hate remove?
This the deed of Jove alone,
And this his genuine son.
To whom, for justice when I raise the strain,
To whom, save Jove, should I complain?
Great, awful author of our ancient line,
Creative parent, independent lord,
Disposer of the world, righteous, benign,
Sovereign, above the highest high ador'd;
Whene'er he deigns to grace some favour'd head,
Easy alike to him the will, the word, the deed.

DANAUS, CHORUS.

DANAUS.

Be of good courage, daughters; a decree,
Such as you wish, this gen'rous state has pass'd.

CHORUS.

Dear to my soul, with grateful tidings fraught,
Hail, reverend parent! But inform us how
Pass'd the decree; what numbers favour'd us?

DANAUS.

Not one discordant voice jarr'd in their counsels.
The fire of youth glow'd in these aged veins,

When the whole people their uplifted hands
Wav'd in the air, to witness their assent
That we might be permitted here to dwell
Free, unreclaimable, inviolate:
That none presume, native or stranger, hence
To lead us; and should force be us'd, whoe'er
Assists not, him the public sentence drives,
With infamy, an exile from his country.
This the Pelasgian king advis'd, to us
Benevolent, declaring the fierce wrath
Of Jove, protector of the supplicant,
Could not permit this firm and prosp'rous state
To flourish; but such double insult, offer'd
To ev'ry law of hospitality
Sacred and civil, would with twofold vengeance
Draw ruin on it. When the Argives heard
These arguments of winning eloquence,
Impatient of the usual forms, they gave
With hands uplifted their concordant suffrage
Friendly to us: thus Jove decreed th' event.

CHORUS.

Come then, my sisters, for these pious Argives
Breathe we some pious pray'r, whose solemn strain
May reach the ear of Jove. And thou, Supreme,
God of the stranger, hear a stranger's voice
Sincere, unblam'd; and ratify our vows!

STROPHE.

Ye progeny of Jove, whose awful pow'r
In yon ethereal plain
Fixes the glories of your reign,
Bend from your radiant seats your ear,
Attentive to a virgin's pray'r,
And on this gen'rous race your choicest blessings show'r.

Never may war, whose wanton rage
The thund'ring falchion joys to wield,
Joys, when embattled hosts engage,
To mow with ruthless arm the field;
Never with rude discordant roar
Affright the echoes of this shore;
Never with hostile hand
Wave round these glitt'ring tow'rs the blazing brand.
Soft-ey'd humanity dwells here,
That melting to the suppliant's tear
Asserts our hopeless cause;
And spotless piety, whose breast
Submiss reveres Jove's high behest,
And hospitable laws.
Your sacred spirit inspires the free
To form the gen'rous, bold decree,
And man's rude force disdain;
To cast on Heav'n's dread Lord their eye,
The terrors of his vengeance fly,
Nor scorn our female train:
He o'er the impious roof his thunders rolls (26),
And awful in his wrath appals the guilty souls.

ANTISTROPHE.

Our kindred train, suppliants of holy Jove,
Pelasgia's sons revere,
And make our wrongs their gen'rous care.
For this at ev'ry hallow'd shrine
Propitious be each pow'r divine;
For this beneath this solemn-shaded grove

(26) We are indebted to the acumen of Pauw for bringing this sublime idea to light.

Our raptur'd invocations rise,
And Heav'n shall hear the pious strains.
Ah! never may malignant skies
Blast the fresh glories of your plains:
Nor pestilence with pois'nous breath,
Waste your thin towns with livid death:
Nor war's stern pow'r deface
The blooming flow'rs that youth's fair season grace.
Still may your chiefs, a reverend band,
Around the hallow'd altars stand;
And ardent for the state
Pour the warm vow to Heav'n's high Lord,
The great, the just; whose will ador'd
With hoar law tempers fate (27).
Still rise new chiefs, a lengthen'd line,
(Kind on their birth, Diana, shine!)
The brave, the wise, the good:
But never discord's dread alarms
Your madd'ning cities rouse to arms,
And stain your streets with blood:
Nor pale disease her sickly dews display,
Touch'd by thy golden beams, ambrosial fount of day.

EPODE.

Fav'ring seasons grace the year,
Crown with rich fruits your cultur'd plains;
The joyful flock, the sportive steer,
Bound wanton o'er your wide domains.
Each immortal show'ring treasures,
Wake the soft melodious measures;

(27) Hoar law, an elegant expression to which the cana fides of the Latins corresponds. Jupiter is now addressed as the just and righteous king, and therefore governing by the ancient laws of heaven.

Let the chastely-warbled lay
The muses' rapture-breathing shell obey.
Firm may the honours of your laws remain,
And prudence in your counsels reign:
Just to yourselves, and to the stranger kind,
May peace to sleep consign the bloodless sword;
Each honour to your country's gods assign'd;
Each laurell'd shrine with hallow'd rites ador'd;
The parent's hoary head with reverence crown'd;
View this, ye righteous gods, and stretch protection round!

DANAUS, CHORUS.

DANAUS.

I like this well: wise are these votive strains.
But though your father brings unwelcome tidings,
New, and unlook'd for, fear not you th' event.
From yon high mound, where first you suppliant stood,
I saw a ship, I mark'd its waving streamer,
Its swelling sails, and all its gallant trim;
Its prow with heedful eye observes its way,
Obedient to the helm that guides behind;
Unfriendly sight! the sailors too I mark'd,
Conspicuous in white robes their sable limbs (28).
Th' attendant vessels, proudly riding, sweep
The wat'ry way; she foremost near the land
Now furls her sails, and all the shouting crew
Bend to the eager oar. Behoves you now
Sedate and sage attention, nor neglect
These gods. I haste to bring their gen'rous aid,
The patrons, the protectors of your cause.

(28) It had been observed before, that the Ægyptian rowers were a sable train.

Haply some herald may be sent, with charge
To claim you as their prize: it shall not be:
Fear not th' event: but should our aid come slow,
Forget not the protection of this place.
Be comforted: the day, the hour shall come,
When he, that dares affront the gods, shall feel
Their chast'ning vengeance bursting on his head.

CHORUS.

How my frame trembles! Ah! my father, see
With winged speed the ships arrive; between
No interval of time: my stiff'ning limbs
Are chain'd with fear, and ev'ry hope of safety,
If safety lies in flying far, is lost.

DANAUS.

Since this decree is pass'd, fear not, my child;
Argos, I know, will arm in your defence.

CHORUS.

Fatally fierce they are, and on their pride
Destruction waits, and never-sated war,
These sons of old Ægyptus, not to thee
Unknown: E'en now their firm-compacted ships
Black o'er the angry deep insulting ride,
Eager to land their sable-tinctur'd hosts.

DANAUS.

And they shall find a host, whose toil-strung arms (29)
Relax not in the sun's meridian heat.

CHORUS.

Forsake me not, ah! leave me not alone,
I pray thee, father: a forsaken woman

(29 The gymnastic exercises of the Grecians, to which they were all trained, formed their bodies to this firmness; it is intended here as a sarcasm on the Ægyptians, who are supposed to melt beneath the noon-tide heat.

Is very weak: their wily, faithless minds,
Like obscene crows, spare not the hallow'd altar.

DANAUS.

Now fair befall our cause, if their mad rage,
Insulting thee, my child, insults the gods.

CHORUS.

Neither these tridents, nor this solemn scene
Will awe them to refrain their impious hands.
They scorn the gods, and with unhallow'd force
Rush madly on, like savage, rav'ning dogs.

DANAUS.

But dogs, they say, yield to the mast'ring wolves (30);
And the soft reed to the firm spiked corn.

CHORUS.

They have the force of wild and savage beasts;
We must escape them therefore, as we may.

DANAUS.

Slow are th' advances of a naval train;
Slow the arrangements of the ships; the care
To fix the cables, slow; th' experienc'd chiefs
Trust not too soon the biting anchor's hold,
If station'd where no harbour winds around:
And when the golden sun withdraws his beams,
The gloom of night brings many an anxious care;
Nor dare they, till their vessels ride secure,
Attempt to land. But take thou heed, nor let
Thy fears impel thee to neglect the gods;

(30) As the Chorus had compared the sons of Ægyptus to ravening dogs, Danaus expresses the Grecians by wolves, as stronger and fiercer animals; perhaps it would be too great a refinement with Stanley, to derive the former allusion from their Anubis, and the latter from the Apollo Λύκειος. The comparison is continued in the next line, where the papyrus, whose root was a common food in Ægypt, is despised as inferior to the corn of Greece.

But ask their aid. The state will not disdain
My age, that tells with youthful warmth its tidings.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Ye rising hills, whose reverend heads
Majestic wave their awe-commanding shades,
What woes our shudd'ring souls await?
Or flying on the wings of fear,
In some cavern dark and drear
Deep shall we plunge, and hide us from our fate?
Oh that I could as smoke arise,
That rolls its black wreaths through the air;
Mix with the clouds, that o'er the skies
Show their light forms, and disappear:
Or like the dust be tost
By ev'ry sportive wind, till all be lost!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Such thoughts in deep despair I roll,
The gloom of sorrow black'ning on my soul.
Ah father, the vex'd ocean round
What horrors struck thy aching sight?
Dismay, and pale affright,
And wild amazement sink me to the ground.
Shall then the base, detested band
With rude touch seize us for their own?
No: rather shall this daring hand
Prepare for death the conscious zone;
Rather in deep disdain
My pale shade sink to Pluto's dreary reign.

STROPHE 2.

Oh might I sit sublime in air,
Where wat'ry clouds the freezing snows prepare!

Or on a rock whose threat'ning brow,
Th' aerial vulture's unreach'd seat,
In solitary state
Frowns ruinous o'er th' affrighted waste below:
Roll'd headlong down its rugged side,
A mangled carcass let me lie,
E'er dragg'd a pale, unwilling bride,
Victim to sad necessity;
And my indignant heart
Feel the keen wounds of sorrow's tort'ring dart.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Throw me, e'er that detested day,
To prowling dogs and rav'nous birds a prey.
No form of death affrights me now:
O thou, assign'd the wretches' friend,
To bid his miseries end,
And in oblivion's balm to steep his wo;
Come, gentle death, e'er that sad hour
Which drags me to the nuptial bed;
And let me find in thy soft pow'r
A refuge from the force I dread;
O spread thy sable cloud,
And in its unpierc'd gloom our sorrows shroud!

EPODE.

Higher let your voices rise,
And swell the choral descant to the skies,
Notes of such a lofty vein,
That gods may listen to the solemn strain!
Eternal Sire, from heav'n's high throne,
If thy indignant eye-balls glow
With vengeance at foul deeds below,
Look down, thou sovereign of the world, look down:

Ægyptus' sons, a ruffian race,
Our flying footsteps chase;
And on our trembling, weeping band
Advance to lay their vengeful hand:
Extend thy golden scales,
For without thee what mortal worth avails?
By land, by sea,
They seek their prey;
Oh! ere they seize it, may the ruffians die!
Again I raise the mournful cry.
They come, they come, the haughty foes:
These are but preludes to my woes,
To yon strong rampires bend your flight;
By sea, by land they rush severe,
And with their stern and threat'ning air,
The softness of our sex affright.
Look down, thou sovereign of the world, and save!

HERALD, CHORUS.

HERALD.

Hence to the ship, hence with your utmost speed (31).

CHORUS.

No, never, never; drag me, drag me, stab me,
Rend from these mangled limbs my bleeding head.

HERALD.

Hence to the ship, abandon'd wretches, hence,
That waits to waft you, with your injur'd lords,
O'er the wide billows of yon briny deep.

(31) The timid modesty of these virgins, and the sober piety of Danaus, are finely contrasted with the brutal insolence and sacrilegious violence of the Ægyptian herald: this carries the distress to its greatest height, raises our pity and terror, and adds a peculiar lustre to the calm dignity of Pelasgus in the next scene.

Haste, or this spear, with bridal garlands bound (32),
Taught a less gentle office, there shall place you
Smarting with many' a wound; there sit, and sigh.
No more, I charge you, of these froward moods,
Or force shall drive them from you.

CHORUS.

Wo is me!

HERALD.

Haste, quit these seats, haste to the ships, and go
Inviolate to the city of the pious.

CHORUS.

Ah! never may these eyes again behold
That rich enlivening stream, which he who drinks
Feels his fresh blood dance lively in his veins.
My unpolluted life amidst these seats,
These sacred seats, old man, preserve me sacred.

HERALD.

Nay, tell not me; but to the ship, the ship,
Averse or not averse, quick shalt thou go;
Or vengeance, chast'ning vengeance to thy feet
Add wings, and up the bark's tall sides pursue thee.

CHORUS.

Ah wo, wo, wo! Barbarian, may the winds
In all their fury hurl thee on the rocks
Of rough Cilicia's brow; or dash thy corse

(32) Pauwii conjecturâ Νυμφοδετῳ δορι, hasta quæ sponso geritur, et cui annexa est sponsi causa, conjecturas omnes quascunque hactenus vidi mirâ suâ suavitate longe longeque superat. But the translator is not to be bantered out of this reading by Attic wit, nor to be beat out of it by the Γυμφοδετῳ δορι, the σκηπτρῳ ἠλοισι πεπαρμενῳ Heathii. This whole scene is so difficult, and so miserably mutilated, that the reader of Æschylus is under the greatest obligations to Pauw for his free and manly conjectures. If he has not always hit on the true reading, he has at least given a probable and ingenious one, and added sense and spirit to that rude and undigested mass, from which none before had been extended.

An outcast on the swelling sands beneath.

HERALD.

Cry, shriek, invoke the gods; yet shalt thou not
Escape the ship of Ægypt; louder shriek,
Cry wo, and wo: if the name please thee, take it.

CHORUS.

Ah wretched me! Pollution of the land,
How fierce he yells! Insolent wretch, away,
Thy rude touch wounds me: for this ruffian force,
Rise, mighty Nile, whelm him beneath thy floods!

HERALD.

Hence, I command you; to the rolling vessel
Instantly hence: if one presumes to linger,
I pay no reverence to your crisped locks,
This hand perforce shall drag her by her tresses.

CHORUS.

Ah me, immortal Sire! Insolent Force
Will hurry me away: it drags me now
Entangled in its nets; and all my hopes
Are vanish'd like a dream, a dusky dream.
Earth, I adjure thee, shield me; shield me, Jove,
God of this land; save me in this hard conflict.

HERALD.

Gods of this land! They awe not me; my youth
They nourish'd not, nor to old age upheld me.

CHORUS.

Near me the serpent rolls his train, and soon
Will, like a pois'nous viper, dart upon me.
Earth, I adjure thee, shield me; shield me, Jove,
God of this land; save me in this hard conflict.

HERALD.

If one of you perversely lingers here,
Your richly purfled stoles shall find no mercy.

CHORUS.

Ye rulers of the city, Force o'erpow'rs me.

HERALD.

You shall see many rulers, doubt not, soon,
Ægyptus' sons; no anarchy is here.

CHORUS.

Unlook'd for ruin comes, O king, upon us.

HERALD.

I must use force, I see, and pluck you hence
Dragg'd by the locks, since my words move you not.

PELASGUS, HERALD, CHORUS.

PELASGUS.

Whence these outrageous deeds? How dares thy pride
Offer this insult to the land, where dwell
Pelasgian men? Or didst thou deem that women
Alone inhabit here? Thy savage acts,
Barbarian, touch the dignity of Greece.
Learn thy mistake then, and thine high offence.

HERALD.

Against what law, what right, have I offended?

PELASGUS.

First, dost thou know thou art a stranger here?

HERALD.

A stranger here I found what I had lost.

PELASGUS.

To whom hast thou address'd thee for protection?

HERALD.

To Mercury, who directs the stranger's search.

PELASGUS.

The gods! Thou hast no reverence for the gods.

HERALD.

Yes, for the gods of Nile, a holy reverence.

PELASGUS.

But none for these, if right I understand thee.

HERALD.

These lead I hence; and who shall take them from me?

PELASGUS.

Dare but to touch them, dear shalt thou abide it.

HERALD.

Is this your hospitality to strangers?

PELASGUS.

I owe the ruffian none, that robs the gods.

HERALD.

Go then, announce this to Ægyptus' sons.

PELASGUS.

It suits not me; my soul disdains the office.

HERALD.

Then let me speak, and plainly; it becomes
A herald's office to speak all things plain.
How ruffians, say, how robbers of the gods,
This kindred train, that comes to claim these women?
Not by the voice of evidence does Mars
Decide these things (33); nor for a mulct of gold
Compound the dreadful quarrel; e'er it ends
Many shall shed their dear blood in the dust,
Many lie low on earth, and bite the ground.

(33) Pelasgus had before gently rebuked the herald for the impropriety of his conduct; he had landed on a foreign shore, and advanced without asking the protection of any of the natives, and without reverencing the sanctity of the place; he rudely answers I found here what I had lost, and I will seize it: being commanded not to touch the virgins, he has recourse to his sacred office, and promises to explain himself clearly; but instead of this abruptly declares, that Mars decides not by evidence, and at once threatens war: this is a strong mark of the impetuous and lawless violence of the sons of Ægyptus. Perhaps the critical taste of Pauw may be acknowledged in this remark.

PELASGUS.

Hear then what honour prompts, what justice dictates,
And bear it to the partners of thy voyage.
If these approve, if their free will incline them,
Lead them, if gentle words win their assent.
This firm decree the suffrage of the state
Has render'd sacred, not by force to yield
A train of females; this resolve, be sure,
Is strongly fix'd, and never can be shaken.
Though not engrav'd on tablets, nor enroll'd
In seal-stamp'd volumes, my free voice declares it
In words of plainest import. Take thy answer;
Hence from my sight, with thy best speed be gone.

HERALD.

Know then a rising war awaits thy choice:
Valour and conquest crown the helms of men.

PELASGUS.

You shall be met by men, whose lively blood
Dull draughts of barley wine have never clogg'd (34).
Now virgins, with your train of faithful friends,
Dismiss your fears; enter this town, whose walls
Strong-built, and crown'd with many' a bulwark, lift
Their tow'red heads impregnable: within
The state has many structures; nor is mine
A thin inhabitation; such a house,
Where cheerful numbers live in wealth and splendor,

(34) That benevolent conqueror Osiris, whose military expeditions were undertaken with a view of instructing mankind in planting, sowing, and the useful arts of civilized life, with great care introduced the vine, wherever the soil was adapted to its growth; where it was not, as particularly in Ægypt, he taught the inhabitants the use of ferment, and showed them the way to make a wine of barley little inferior to the juice of the grape.—See Bryant's Analysis, vol. ii. p. 59. This liquor Pelasgus holds in contempt compared with the rich and generous wines of Greece.

81571

May haply please you: if a private mansion,
To your own use devote, be more your wish;
The best of these, the most approv'd, is yours;
Make your free choice: I will protect you; all
This friendly state, supporting their decree,
Will shield you. What, wish you more pow'rful guardians?

CHORUS.

For these thy bounties may the bounteous gods
Show'r blessings on thy head, thou gen'rous king
Of brave Pelasgia! But benevolent
Send us our father Danaus, on whose firm
And provident counsels we rely. His care
And sage advice is needful, where to choose
Our dwelling, our secure retreat. The tongue
Of Slander is too prompt with wanton malice
To wound the stranger: act we then with caution.

PELASGUS.

With honour, lovely virgins, with the voice
Of fair-applauding fame amidst our city
Shall your appointment be, where'er your father
Assigns to each her mansion and attendants.

DANAUS, CHORUS.

DANAUS.

Daughters, it well becomes you to these Argives,
As to th' immortal gods, to offer vows,
Libation, sacrifice, and ev'ry rite
Religion knows; so liberal their protection,
So readily they lent their friendly ears,
And favour'd all my deeds against these youths,
These kindred youths, whose headlong pride thus haunts you.
Behold these spears around, to me assign'd
An honourable guard, that no rude hand

With barb'rous rage may lift the secret sword,
And with my blood pollute the pious land.
This grace, this condescension claims my thanks,
And you with grateful minds honour it ever.
To all the wise instructions of your father,
Grav'd in your faithful tablets, grave these also,
That after-times may hold this stranger train
In reverence. Know then this, The tongue of malice
Is ever prompt to wound the stranger's fame
With stings of infamy: I charge you then
Disgrace me not. I see your blooming age,
Enforcing soft desire; I know how hard
To guard the lovely flow'rs that grace that season.
Beasts love to riot on their sweets (35), and man,
Each insect, and each wanton-winged bird.
The Queen of Love proclaims their opening bloom;
Ah, would she suffer it to remain uncropt!
And on the delicate tints, that kindling glow
On beauty's vermeil cheek, each roving youth
With melting wishes darts the amorous glance.
We brook not this; else why these various toils,
These wand'rings o'er the wide-extended main?
Let us not work this scandal to ourselves,
And triumph to our foes. Two mansions here
Are offer'd to your choice; Pelasgus one
Would give, and one the state; beneath whose roof
No male attendant waits: the choice is easy.
Only observe these precepts of your father,

(35) The force of love through all the animal creation is here finely described: Lucretius seems to have it in his eye in that exquisitely beautiful address to Venus with which he opens his poem: but the chaste regard to decorum, which breathes through the admonition of Danaus, deserves to be written in letters of gold.

And guard with heedful care your virgin honour.

CHORUS.

O may the pow'rs of Heav'n in all besides
Be gracious to us; in our virgin honour
Have confidence: be their high wills unchang'd,
I shall not deviate from my mind's fix'd plan.

CHORUS.

Go then, ye pure, ye pious train,
In triumph go to those bless'd pow'rs,
That o'er this state extend their reign
Imperial guardians of these tow'rs;
Imperial guardians of these glades,
Along whose hallow'd shades
His dark'ning stream old Erasinus rolls:
With courage arm your souls.
No more to Nile's deep floods belong
The warbled voice, the raptur'd song (36);
Our praise Pelasgia's towns demand;
And each fresh fount, that loves to lead
His humid train through grove, through mead,
And rolls luxuriance through the land.
Virgin Diana, bend thine eye,
And piteous of a virgin's woes,
O save ensnared chastity,
From the rude touch of hated foes:
Nor see thy struggling vot'ries led
Where Venus decks the bed!
Nor, Queen of Love, shall our mellifluous lays
Be silent in thy praise:

(36) As Egypt was indebted for its fruitfulness to the overflowing of the Nile, the first rising of its waters was marked with religious care, and welcomed with solemn hymns.

For thou, next Heav'n's imperial queen,
In highest grace with Jove art seen,
And mighty deeds declare thy pow'r:
The passions hear thy soft control;
Thy sweet voice melts the willing soul,
Enchanted with thy honied lore.

Round thee, where'er thou lead'st the way,
Joyful the frolic Cupids rove;
And as their antic sports they play,
Whisper the harmony of love.
But what have I with love or joy?
My peace wild fears annoy,
The miseries of flight, pursuit's alarms,
And slaughter-threat'ning arms:
Why else the quick, the fav'ring gales
Waft o'er the waves their flying sails?

SEMICHORUS.

This is the fix'd decree of fate (37);
And thus high Heav'n's unbounded Lord,
Pronounc'd th' irrevocable word,
And doom'd us to the nuptial state.

CHORUS.

Ah! never may his sovereign will
Me to Ægyptus' sons unite!

SEMICHORUS.

This is to grasp at shadows still,
And sooth thy soul with vain delight.

(37) This is an allusion, dark as it ought to be, to the future fortune of these persecuted ladies: their story is well known. The epistle of Hypermnestra to Lynceus by Ovid is a fine supplement to this tragedy.

CHORUS.

Know'st thou his will? Or has thine eye
Look'd through futurity?

SEMICHORUS.

His mind I dare not scan, immense, profound:
And thou thy wishes bound;
'Gainst Heav'n's high will exclaim no more,
But in mute meekness learn t'adore.

CHORUS.

Almighty Sire, whose healing hand
Sooth'd thy lov'd Iö's soul to rest,
With comfort cheer this sorrowing breast,
And save us from this hostile band!
For me through fortune's cloud hope beams her ray,
And from that bright'ning part goes bright'ning on;
So right succeeding right shall force its way,
And the good gods complete what Greece begun.

THE SEVEN CHIEFS AGAINST THEBES.

THE

SEVEN CHIEFS

AGAINST

THEBES.

BESIDES this Siege of Thebes, Æschylus wrote three Tragedies on the subjects of Laius, Œdipus, and the Sphinx, which are lost. Wo to the ravenous jaws of time, that have devoured these precious morsels of antiquity; we should otherwise have had from this great master a regular, and, no doubt, an interesting account of this illustrious and unfortunate family. It is said that Æschylus particularly valued himself upon this tragedy: not without reason; for it has all that bold painting, with which we might expect his martial genius would embellish such a subject. Always magnificent, he has fixed the scene in Thebes before the principal temple: the clash of arms, the neighing of the horses, and the shouts of the soldiers are heard: Eteocles appears surrounded with the citizens, whom he animates to defend the walls: in the

mean time the Chorus, which is composed of Theban Ladies, distracted with their fears, are hanging on the statues of the gods that adorn the area before the temple. Longinus has remarked on the sublimity of the dialogue; it is worthy an experienced veteran and a brave young king arming in defence of his crown, his life, and his honour; it is worthy of Æschylus. The characters of the Seven Chiefs, that command in the attack, are exquisitely marked and varied; and their impetuous ferocity is admirably contrasted with the calm and deliberate courage of those appointed to oppose them. The shields of six of these chiefs are charged with armorial bearings (1) expressive of their characters, and as regular as if they had been marshalled by a herald at arms: the impresses are devised with a fine imagination and wonderful propriety.

The judicious choice of the persons of the Chorus forms one of the principal graces of this tragedy, as it gave the poet an opportunity of mixing the natural timidity of the female character with the animated and fiery daring of heroes, the fears of these daughters of Cadmus presenting nothing to their

(1) The origin of these insignia is not known, but we have here a proof of their high antiquity; they were borne as marks of noble descent, or illustrious action, and as such were of distinguishing honour: but should they, in the ambitious meanness of future times (this age is too pure to admit of such a prostitution), be *assumed* by such as are neither distinguished by high birth nor virtuous action, by such as owe their wealth to the wantonness of fortune, or to deeds that deserve a different kind of elevation, they must necessarily suffer great *abatements of honour*, and the proud *achievements* of virtue sink into *common charges*.

imagination but the scenes of distress and horror, which the insolence of conquest spreads through a vanquished and plundered city, and this painted in the warmest colours, in the strongest style of Æschylus.

Besides the intrinsic beauty of this tragedy, which is very striking, it has to us this further merit, that it gave birth to three of the finest poems of antiquity, the Antigone of Sophocles, the Phœnissæ of Euripides, and the Thebaïd of Statius.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ETEOCLES.

SOLDIER.

ANTIGONE.

ISMENE.

HERALD.

CHORUS OF THEBAN VIRGINS.

THE

SEVEN CHIEFS

AGAINST

THEBES.

ETEOCLES, CHORUS.

ETEOCLES.

YE citizens of Cadmus (2), it behoves
The man that guides the helm of state (3), to speak
What the sad times require; nor suffer sleep
To weigh his eyelids down. For if success

(2) There are so many allusions in this tragedy to the history of Cadmus, that it may not be improper to lay it before the reader in one view. When Jupiter, in the form of a bull, had carried off Europa, the daughter of Agenor king of Phœnicia, the disconsolate father sent his son Cadmus in search of her, commanding him not to return unless he found her. Cadmus having wandered over the world in vain, consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphos; the answer of the god was,

> Behold amidst the fields a lonely cow,
> Unworn with yokes, unbroken to the plough;
> Mark well the place where first she lays her down,
> There measure out thy walls, and build thy town. ADDISON.

He obeyed. Some of his attendants were sent to a river nigh the place, to bring living water for a sacrifice which he was preparing to Jupiter; an immense

Attends our toils, to the good gods we bow (4),
The authors of the blessing: should misfortune,
Avert it Heav'n! befall, Eteocles
Shall hear his name alone wide through the city
Insulted by each tongue, that vents its spleen
In mutinous reproach, or loud laments:
From which may Jove, the guardian of our state,
Defend the sons of Cadmus! But this hour
Calls on you all, whether your flow'ry spring
Yet wants the prime of manhood, or your age
Puts forth its firmest strength, t'exert your pow'rs,
Well it becomes you, to defend the city,
The altars of the gods presiding here
(Ah, never may their honours be effac'd!),

dragon rushed from his cave and killed them: Cadmus, to revenge the death of his friends, fought with this dragon and slew him; then, by the admonition of Minerva, he sowed the teeth of the dragon in the ground, from which a host of men completely armed suddenly arose; these furiously attacked each other, till only five of the number remained alive: peace was made between them, and Cadmus associated them to his train. The Thebans afterwards were proud of deriving some of their best families from this dragon race. Cadmus now built Thebes, and having established his colony, married Harmonia, the daughter of Mars and Venus; all the gods attended at the nuptials, and each honoured the bride with some present.

(3) The man that guides the helm of state, ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως δίκαια νωμῶν. This beautiful metaphor I believe will be found one of those select few, which are universal in all the polished languages of civilized nations; our author uses it again v. 62, and v. 658 of this play; and his contemporary, Pindar, in his first Pythian Ode, v. 159; and indeed almost every author in prose or poetry since that period: Horace even addresses the republic itself under the character of a ship; and Cicero, in his oration pro domo suâ, says, In illis tenebris reipublicæ cæcisque nubibus et procellis, quum senatum a gubernaculis dejecisses, populum e navi exturbasses, ipse archipirata cum grege prædonum impurissimo plenissimis velis navigares.—R. P. JODRELL.

(4) The piety of the ancients in ascribing their success to the gods was conspicuous and uniform: hence the χαριστήρια of the Greeks, and the grates of the Latins were presents to their gods to testify their gratitude for the divine assistance.—STANLEY.

Your children, and this land, your common parent,
And dearest nurse, who on her fost'ring soil
Upheld with bounteous care your infant steps,
And train'd you to this service, that your hands
In her defence might lift the faithful shield.
E'en to this day indeed the gods incline
To favour us; and though so long immur'd
Within our rampires, each bold work of war
Hath prosper'd in our hands. But now the seer,
That listens to the flight of birds (5), and the ice
Forms in his prescient mind the sure presage,
Guiltless of fire, from their oracular wings
Draws his deep skill, and warns us that the pow'rs
Of Greece, combin'd against us, in the night
Advancing, meditate the dark assault.
Haste all then to the walls, haste to the bulwarks
With all your arms, fill ev'ry tow'r, secure
Each pass, stand firm at ev'ry gate, be bold,
Nor fear th' assailing numbers: Heav'n is with us.
Meanwhile on ev'ry quarter have I sent
To observe their forces, and descry their march:
By these, not charg'd, I trust, in vain to watch,
Inform'd I guard against the wiles of war.

SOLDIER, ETEOCLES, CHORUS.

SOLDIER.

Illustrious king of Thebes, I bring thee tidings
Of firm assurance from the foe; these eyes

(5) Apollodorus tells us that Minerva had given Tiresias, as a compensation for his loss of sight, which she could not restore, the faculty of understanding the voices of all birds: hence his prophecies were taken from auguries only; so that the inspection of the entrails placed on the altar, the mounting of the smoke and the flame, and all the omens to which fire was necessary, were out of his department.

Beheld each circumstance. Seven valiant chiefs
Slew on the black-orb'd shield the victim bull (6),
And, dipping in the gore their furious hands,
In solemn oath attest the god of war,
Bellona, and the carnage-loving pow'r
Of terror (7), sworn from their firm base to rend
These walls, and lay their ramparts in the dust;

(6) Longinus has selected this passage as an instance of the bold and heroic genius of Æschylus. The sublimity here arises from the assemblage of the images; the bull slain on the black-orbed shield, shows it to be a sacrifice to Pluto, and a solemn devotion of themselves; the dipping of their hands in the blood, the invocation of Mars, Bellona, and Terror, their shedding tears but without any sign of remorse, and their souls of iron glowing with valour, with the simile of the lion glaring determined battle, are greatly conceived, and together breathe a solemn and terrible magnificence.

Mr. Jodrell observes, that the beauty of this passage has not secured it from the satirical lash of Aristophanes, whose Lysistrata, tendering the oath to her female confederates, proposes to imitate Æschylus by slaying a sheep over a shield, v. 189.

(7) Terror had before been personified by Homer as the son of Mars:

Οἷος δὲ Φροτολοιγὸς Ἄρης πόλεμον δὲ μέτεισι,
Τῷ δὲ Φόβος φίλος υἱὸς ἅμα κρατερὸς καὶ ἀταρβὴς
Ἔσσετο, ὅστ' ἐφόβησε καὶ ἀλκιφρονά περ πολεμιστήν.

Il. 13. v. 198.

Terror, his best lov'd son, attends his course,
Arm'd with stern boldness, and enormous force;
The pride of haughty warriors to confound,
And lay the strength of tyrants on the ground.—Pope.

Virgil has imitated this passage as far as the imperfection of the Latin language would permit:

Circumque atræ formidinis ora,
Iræque, insidiæque, dei comitatus aguntur.

Æn. 12. v. 335.

Wrath, terror, treason, tumult, and despair,
Dire faces and deform'd, surround the car,
Friends of the god, and followers of the war.—Dryden.

I mean that the beauty of the prosopopœia, or personification, is here considerably diminished by Formido, Iræ, and Insidiæ, being of the feminine gender, instead of masculine, as Φόβος, or as terror may be made in English.

R. P. Jodrell.

Or, dying, with their warm blood steep this earth.
Each in Adrastus' car some dear remembrance (8)
Piled to their distant parents, whilst their eyes
Dropp'd tears, but on their face was no remorse.
Each soul of iron glowing with the rage
Of valour, as the lion when he glares
Determin'd battle. What I now relate
Sleeps not, nor lingers: round the urn I left them,
By lot deciding to what gate each chief
Shall lead his forces. These against select
The best, the bravest of the sons of Thebes,
And instant at the gates assign their stations.
For all in arms the Argive host comes on
Involv'd in dust, and from the snorting steeds
The thick foam falls, and dews the whiten'd fields.
Be thine the provident pilot's gen'rous care,
Guard well the town, ere yet the storm assails it;
E'en now the waves of war roar o'er the plain (9):
Seize then this fair occasion, instant seize it.
My faithful eye this day shall hold the watch,
That well inform'd, no danger may surprise thee.

ETEOCLES.

O Jove, O Earth, O all ye guardian gods;
And thou dread curse, the fury of my father,

(8) It was the custom of the ancients, before a battle, in which they apprehended danger, to send home to their friends some pledges as remembrances, things of little value in themselves, but rendered dear by the circumstance: these are placed in the chariot of Adrastus, because Amphiaraus had declared, that he alone of the confederate chiefs should return to Argos.

(9) Æschylus is distinguished for bold and glowing metaphors: nothing can be more picturesque, animated, or more philosophically exact, than the present expression, which calls an army approaching, a land-wave advancing with a roaring noise: the same metaphor occurs afterwards, v. 116. of this play.

R. P. JODRELL.

Of fatal pow'r, O rend not from its roots
This ruin'd city by th' insulting foe
Trampled in dust, her sweet Helladian tongue
Silent, and all her sacred fires extinct!
Ah! never let this land, this town of Cadmus
Bend her free neck beneath the servile yoke!
Protect her, save her; as you share her honours
I plead: a flourishing state reveres the gods.

CHORUS.

Wo, wo, intolerable wo!
Fierce from their camps the hosts advance,
Before their march with thund'ring tread
Proud o'er the plain their fiery coursers prance,
And hither bend their footsteps dread:
Yon cloud of dust that chokes the air,
A true though tongueless messenger,
Marks plain the progress of the foe.
And now the horrid clash of arms,
That, like the torrent, whose impetuous tide
Roars down the mountain's craggy side,
Shook the wide fields with fierce alarms,
With nearer terrors strikes our souls,
And through our chaste recesses rolls:
Hear, all ye pow'rs of Heav'n, propitious hear,
And check the furies of this threat'ning war!

The crowded walls around
Loud clamours rend the sky;
Whilst rang'd in deep array th' embattled pow'rs
Their silver shields (10) lift high,

(10) Stanley rightly observes that the common soldiers bore white or plain shields, but the generals had devices on theirs. Therefore Euripides (Phœniss. v. 116.) calls the Argive army Λεύκασπιν: and Virgil, speaking of Helenor, who

And, level with the ground
To lay their rampir'd heads, assail our tow'rs.
What guardian god shall I implore?
Bending at what sacred shrine
Call from their happy seats what pow'rs divine,
And suppliant ev'ry sculptur'd form adore?
The time demands it: why then, why delay?—
The sound of arms, swells on my' affrighted ear.—
Hold now the pall, the garland (11), as you pray.—
Hark! 'tis the rude clash of no single spear.
Stern god of war,
Dost thou prepare
Thy sacred city to betray?
Look down, look down (12);
O save thine own;
Nor leave us to the foe a prey:

was born of a slave, and consequently ignoble, says, parmâ inglorius albâ. Æn. 9.

Slight were his arms, a sword and silver shield,
No marks of honour charg'd its empty field.—DRYDEN.

R. P. JODRELL.

(11) In great distresses it was customary for the noblest dames to go in procession to the temples, carrying in their hands rich robes and crowns, with which they adorned the images of the tutelary gods, whose protection they implored: thus Virgil describes the Trojan dames:

Interea ad templum non æquæ Palladis ibant
Crinibus Iliades passis, peplumque ferebant
Suppliciter tristes.—— Æn. 1. v. 483.

Meantime the Trojan dames, oppress'd with woe,
To Pallas' fane in long procession go:—
They weep, they beat their breasts, they rend their hair,
And rich embroider'd vests for presents bear.—DRYDEN.

This is taken from the sixth Iliad, where the augur Helenus assigns this office to his mother Hecuba.

(12) Ἐπιδ', ἔπιδε.—The frequent repetitions of the same word in this Chorus are extremely natural, and the language of fear in women trembling at the approach of the enemy.—R. P. JODRELL.

If e'er thy soul had pleasure in the brave,
God of the golden helm, hear us, and save!

And all ye pow'rs, whose guardian care (13)
Protects these walls, this favour'd land,
O hear these pious, suppliant strains;
Propitious aid us, aid a virgin band,
And save us from the victor's chains!
For all around with crested pride
High waves the helm's terrific tide,
Toss'd by the furious breath of war.
And thou, great Jove, almighty sire,
Confound with foul defeat these Argive pow'rs,
Whose arms insult our leaguer'd tow'rs,
And fright our souls with hostile fire.
The reins that curb their proud steeds 'round,
Rattle, and death is in the sound:
'Gainst our sev'n gates sev'n chiefs of high command,
In arms spear-proof, take their appointed stand.

Daughter of Jove, whose soul
Glows at th' embattled plain:
And thou by whom the pawing steed arose (14),

(13) The gods here addressed, θεοὶ πολισσοῦχοι χθονὸς, were those before whose images the Chorus now stood. Mars and Venus are invoked with peculiar propriety, as the parents of Harmonia, and so the great progenitors of the Cadmeian line.

(14) Neptune acquired the title of Ἵππιος from being the creator of the horse, according to the fabulous mythology, and is thus invoked by Virgil in the opening of his Georgics,

Tuque O cui prima frementem
Fudit equum magno tellus pereussa tridente
Neptune.

And thou, whose trident, struck the teeming earth,
And made a passage for the courser's birth.—DRYDEN.

The story was, that he and Minerva both claimed the honour of giving their

Great monarch of the main
Curb'd by thy strong control;
From our fears free us, free us from our foes!
On thee, stern Mars, again I call:
Haste thee, god, and with thee bring
The Queen of Love, from whose high race we spring;
If Cadmus e'er was dear, defend his wall!
Thou terror of the savage Phœbus, hear,
In all thy terrors rush upon the foe!
Chaste Virgin-huntress, goddess ever dear,
Wing the keen arrow from thy ready bow!
Hark! fraught with war
The groaning car,
Imperial Juno! shakes the ground;
Fierce as they pass,
The wheels of brass,
Dear Virgin-huntress! roar around:
The gleaming lustre of the brandish'd spear
Glares terribly across the troubled air (15).
Alas my country! must these eyes,
Must these sad eyes behold thy fall?
Ah, what a storm of stones, that flies,
And wing'd with ruin smites the wall!
O Phœbus! at each crowded gate
Begins the dreadful work of fate;
Each arm the thund'ring falchion wields,
And clashes on the sounding shields.

name to Athens: Jupiter decreed, that whoever produced the most useful present to mankind should have the preference. Neptune struck the earth with his trident, and gave existence to this animal; Minerva with her spear raised the olive tree, and conquered.—R. P. JODRELL.

(15) The fire of expression in Æschylus is often incapable of a literal translation. Here the whole atmosphere convulsed with the agitation of spears is said to be inflamed to madness.—R. P. JODRELL.

O thou, whose kind and matchless might,
Blest Onca, through the glowing fight
Obedient conquest joys t' attend,
All our sev'n gates, dread queen, defend!
And all ye mighty, guardian pow'rs,
That here preside, protect our tow'rs:
Nor the war-wasted town betray,
To fierce and dissonant foes a prey!
Ye gods, deliverers of this land,
To whom we stretch the suppliant hand,
Hear us, O hear our virgin pray'r,
And show that Thebes is yet your care!
By ev'ry solemn temple, ev'ry shrine,
Each hallow'd orgie, and each rite divine,
Each honour to your pow'r in rev'rence paid,
Hear us, ye guardian gods, hear us, and aid!

ETEOCLES, CHORUS.

ETEOCLES.

It is not to be borne, ye wayward race (16):
Is this your best, is this the aid you lend
The state, the fortitude with which you steel
The souls of the besieg'd, thus falling down
Before these images to wail, and shriek
With lamentations loud? Wisdom abhors you.
Nor in misfortune, nor in dear success,

(16) Eteocles, with reason, offended at the intimidating cries of these females, treats them with great harshness; his reflections are so uncourtly, that they might well say afterwards "thou scornest our sex:" but certainly they were out of their province: even the fond and gentle Hector says to the amiable Andromache,

No more:—but hasten to thy tasks at home,
There guide the spindle and direct the loom:
Me glory summons to the martial scene,
The field of combat is the sphere for men.—Il. 6. POPE.

Be woman my associate: if her pow'r
Bears sway, her insolence exceeds all bounds;
But if she fears, wo to that house and city.
And now, by holding counsel with weak fear,
You magnify the foe, and turn our men
To flight: thus are we ruin'd by ourselves.
This ever will arise from suffering women
To intermix with men. But mark me well,
Whoe'er henceforth dares disobey my orders,
Be it or man or woman, old or young,
Vengeance shall burst upon him, the decree
Stands irreversible, and he shall die.
War is no female province, but the scene
For men: hence, home; nor spread your mischiefs here.
Hear you, or not? Or speak I to the deaf?

CHORUS.

Dear to thy country, son of Œdipus,
My soul was seiz'd with terror, when I heard
The rapid car roll on, its whirling wheels
Grating harsh thunder; and the iron curb
Incessant clashing on the barbed steed.

ETEOCLES.

What! should the pilot, when the lab'ring bark
Scarce rides the swelling surge, forsake the helm,
And seek his safety from the sculptur'd prow (17)?

CHORUS.

Yet therefore to these ancient images,
Confiding in their sacred pow'r, I ran,
When at the gates sharp sleet of arrowy show'r

(17) Stanley has with much learning and judgement proved, against Heinsius, Scaliger, Grotius, and Bochart, that the images of the tutelary gods were anciently affixed to the prows of ships. The allusion is finely conceived, and expressed with great strength and proper conciseness.

Drove hard; my fears impell'd me to implore
The blest gods to protect the city's strength(18).

ETEOCLES.

Pray that our tow'rs repel the hostile spear.

CHORUS.

This shall the gods——

ETEOCLES.

The gods, they say, prepare
To quit their seats, and leave a vanquish'd town.

(18) The scholiast tells us, that the Trojans, when their city was stormed, saw the gods carrying away their images; this he takes from a tragedy of Sophocles on that subject, which is lost. There is a similar instance in the Troades of Euripides; hence Virgil:

Excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis
Dii, quibus imperium hoc steterat.— Æn. 2.

You see our hopeless state; how every god,
Who guarded Troy, has left his old abode.—PITT.

The Romans were so strongly impressed with this idea, that when they besieged a town they anxiously inquired the name of the tutelary god, whom they evoked with much solemnity. The reason assigned for this desertion was, that amidst such scenes of devastation and carnage the reverence and honours due to the gods must be neglected; this shows the propriety of Eteocles' address before:

Protect her, save her; as you share her honours
I plead: a flourishing state reveres the gods.

The learned Mr. Jodrell observes here, that Jerusalem, when sacked, was said to have been forsaken of its gods; and that the Shekinah, or divine presence, was undoubtedly withdrawn from the ark of the first temple, before it was destroyed by the king of Babylon. He adds, that Tarquin, before he dedicated the temple to Jupiter Capitolinus, performed the ceremony of unhallowing the ground from all other religious institutions, ut area esset tota Jovis. Liv. l. 1. c. 55. He further says, that this idea and veneration of local divinity was by some people carried to such an excess of extravagant folly, that they used to bind their favourite gods in their temples to prevent such desertion; which custom some Christian writers, whose God is not to be confined with mortal fetters, object with great indignation against the Gentiles. He refers us to Arnob. cont. Gent. l. 6.—to Cyprian. ad Demetr. p. 191. Ed. Fell.—Petr. c. 89. p. 435. Ed. Burm.—and to Dioder. Sic. l. 17.—Q. Curtius, l. 4. c. 3.

CHORUS.

Ah, never, whilst I breathe the vital air,
May their blest train forsake us; nor these eyes
Behold destruction raging through our streets,
And in fierce flames our stately structures blaze!

ETEOCLES.

Let not these invocations of the gods
Make you improvident; remember rather
Obedience is the mother of success,
Wedded to safety: so the wise assure us.

CHORUS.

Yet in the gods is a superior pow'r,
Which often in afflictions clears away
Th' impenetrable cloud, whose sullen gloom
Sharp misery hung before our darken'd eyes.

ETEOCLES.

The victim, and the hallow'd sacrifice,
When the foes menace, are the task of men;
Thine, to be silent, and remain at home (19).

CHORUS.

That we possess our city yet unconquer'd,
That yet our tow'rs repel th' assailing foe,
Is from the gods: from them our voice calls down
Further success: Why should this move thy anger?

(19) Thus Sophocles, Γύναι, γυναιξὶ κόσμον ἡ σιγὴ φέρει. Ajax. v. 293. This line is quoted to introduce an anecdote, which deserves to be mentioned. When a learned German paid a visit to the accomplished and modest M. Dacier, he requested her to inscribe her name and a sentence in his travelling book, or album, according to the arrogant custom of his country, among the names of the most eminent scholars in Europe: she at first refused, but was at last prevailed upon, and wrote this celebrated verse of Sophocles; which Dr. Franklin well translates thus,

Woman, thy sex's noblest ornament
Is silence.

R. P. JODRELL.

ETEOCLES.

It does, not, virgin: no; your pious vows
I blame not. But be silent; lest thy fears,
Swelling to this excess, dismay our youth.

CHORUS.

Affrighted at the sudden din of war,
And trembling with my fears, with hasty foot
I sought this citadel, this sacred seat.

ETEOCLES.

If haply now your eyes behold the dead,
Or wounded; burst not forth in loud laments:
For blood and carnage is the food of war.

CHORUS.

Distinct I hear the fiery-neighing steed.

ETEOCLES.

Whate'er thou hear'st, it asks not thy attention.

CHORUS.

The city shakes beneath th' enclosing foes.

ETEOCLES.

Be satisfied: to guard it is my charge.

CHORUS.

I fear: the clash is louder at the gates.

ETEOCLES.

Peace; nor distract the city with thy cries.

CHORUS.

Ye social pow'rs, leave not our walls defenceless.

ETEOCLES.

Wo on thee! Canst thou not bear this in silence?

CHORUS.

Gods of this state, save me from slavery!

ETEOCLES.

Me wouldst thou make a slave, and all the state.

CHORUS.

All-pow'rful Jove, turn on the foe the sword!

ETEOCLES.

Heav'ns, of what quality are women form'd?

CHORUS.

Wretched, as men are, in their country's ruin.

ETEOCLES.

Still wail thy country? Still embrace these gods?

CHORUS.

Wild with my fears, I speak I know not what.

ETEOCLES.

Wouldst thou indulge me in a light request?

CHORUS.

Speak it at once, quickly shall I obey.

ETEOCLES.

Be silent, wretch; nor terrify thy friends.

CHORUS.

I will; and with them bear what Fate decrees.

ETEOCLES.

I praise thy resolution. Clasp no more
These images; but stand apart, and ask
Happier events; entreat the friendly gods
To aid us. Hear my vows; then instant raise
The heav'n-appeasing Pæan, whose high strains
Of solemn import, 'midst her sacred rites,
Greece pours symphonious; strains, that raise the soul
To gen'rous courage, and the fix'd disdain
Of fear and danger. To the guardian gods
Whose tutelary pow'r protects our fields,
Protects our crowded streets; to Dirce's fount;
Nor thee, Ismenus, will I pass unhonour'd;
If conquest crowns our helms, and saves our city,
The hallow'd sacrifice shall bleed, and load

Their smoking altars; this victorious hand
Shall raise the glitt'ring trophies (20), and hang high,
To grace their sacred walls, the rich-wrought vests,
Spoils of the war, rent from the bleeding foe.
Breathe to the gods these vows: but let no sigh
Break forth, no lamentation rude and vain:
Weak is their pow'r to save thee from thy fate.
My charge shall be at our sev'n gates to fix
Six of our bravest youth, myself the seventh,
In dreadful opposition to the foe;
E'er yet the violent and tumultuous cry
Calls me perforce to join the fiery conflict.

CHORUS.

I. 1.

I would obey thee; but my breast
Yet pants with fear, and knows not rest:
Too near my heart distracting care
Wakes all the horrors of despair:
And as the trembling dove, whose fears
Keep watch in her uneasy bow'r,
Thinks in each rustling leaf she hears
The serpent gliding to devour,
I tremble at each sullen sound
Of clashing arms, that roars around:
With all their troops, with all their pow'rs,
Fierce they advance to storm our tow'rs;
Now hurtling in the darken'd sky,
What does my cruel fate prepare!

(20) It was a custom derived from early antiquity to erect trophies to the gods, of the arms of the conquered, in the place where the victory was obtained; hence their Ζεὺς τρόπαιος and τροπαιοῦχος. The vests stripped from the slain were hung up in the temples. This distinction could not escape the sagacity of Pauw.

Rude, batt'ring stones incessant fly,
And all the missive storm of war.

I. 2.

Guard, ye great gods, O guard our wall,
Nor let the tow'rs of Cadmus fall!
Ah! to what fairer, richer plain
Your radiant presence will you deign,
These fields abandon'd to the foes,
Through whose crisp'd shades and smiling meads,
Jocundly warbling as she goes,
Dirce her liquid treasures leads,
And boasts that Tethys never gave,
Nor all her nymphs, a purer wave!
Deign then, ye gods that guard this land,
Here deign to take your hallow'd stand:
Assert your glory: on the foe
Pour rout, and havoc, and dismay,
Confusion wild, soul-with'ring wo,
And flight, that flings his arms away.

I. 3.

Hear then the mournful, solemn strain:
For dreadful were its fate, should this strong wall,
This ancient, rampir'd city, fall,
And spread its light dust o'er th' encumber'd plain,
Beneath the proud Achaian spear,
Dishonour'd sunk, the waste of war.
Should the fresh virgin's bloom, the matron's age,
By the fierce victor's fiery rage;
Their robes all rent, their bleeding bosoms bare,
Be dragg'd by their loose-flowing hair,
Like horses, a reluctant prize;
The desolated streets re-echoing to their cries.

II. 1.

Before my sad presaging soul
What scenes of imag'd horror roll!
I see the tender virgin's wo,
Ere yet her ripen'd beauties glow;
The hateful way I see her tread,
Forcibly torn from her sweet home:
Happier, far happier are the dead;
They rest within the silent tomb.
But, the walls humbled to the ground,
What dreadful mis'ries rage around!
Furious one leads the vengeful bands;
One stains with blood his reeking hands;
Wide roll, outrageous to destroy,
The dusky smoke, and torrent fires;
Whilst slaught'ring Mars with hideous joy
The heav'n-contemning rage inspires.

II. 2.

From house to house, from street to street (21),
The crashing flames roar round, and meet;
Each way the fiery deluge preys,
And girds us with the circling blaze.
The brave, that 'midst these dire alarms
For their lost country greatly dare,
And fir'd with vengeance rush to arms,
Fall victims to the blood-stain'd spear.
The bleeding babe, with innocent cries (22),

(21) The translator makes no apology for adopting the interpretation of Pann. Periti sciunt.

(22) This is a most beautiful and picturesque image: among the horrors of a captive city, which are here so finely painted, it was extremely natural for women to describe infants at the breast shrieking with affright; hence Virgil seems to have borrowed a very pathetic idea:

Drops from his mother's breast, and dies.
See rapine rushes, bent on prey,
His hasty step brooks no delay.
The spoiler, loaded with his store,
Envious the loaded spoiler views;
Disdains another should have more,
And his insatiate toil renews.

II. 3.

Thick on the earth the rich spoil lies (23):
For the rude plunderer's restless-rolling tide,
Their worthless numbers waving wide,
Drop in their wild haste many a glitt'ring prize.
Whilst, in her chaste apartment bred,
The trembling virgin captive led,
Pours, in the anguish of her soul, the tear:
And, torn from all her heart holds dear,
The youthful bride, a novice yet in wo,
Obeys the haughty, happy foe.
But ere such horrors blast my sight,
May these sad eyes close in eternal night (24)!

SEMICHORUS.

See, from his watch the veteran returns,
Bearing, I ween, fresh tidings from yon host,
Of highest import: quick his foot, and hasty.

Et trepidæ matres pressere ad pectora natos.

Æn. 7. v. 518.

Pale at the piercing call, the mothers prest
With shrieks their starting infants to the breast.—PITT.

See also Apollonius Rhodius, l. 4. v. 136.—R. P. JODRELL.

(23) This passage in the original has an obscurity on which the annotators have not vouchsafed to cast one gleam of light: Mr. Heath's interpretation of καρπὸς is beneath the dignity of the occasion. The translator can hardly flatter himself that he has hit on the precise idea of his author, but he has not wilfully deviated from the original.

(24) We are indebted to Pauw for this elucidation.

SEMICHORUS.

This way, behold, the son of Œdipus,
The king himself advances, pressing on
His hurried step to learn their new-form'd measures.

ETEOCLES, SOLDIER, CHORUS.

SOLDIER.

Now I can tell thee, for I know it well,
The disposition of the foe, and how
Each at our gates takes his allotted post.
Already near the Prætian gate in arms
Stands Tydeus raging; for the prophet's voice
Forbids his foot to pass Ismenus' stream,
The victims not propitious: at the pass
Furious, and eager for the fight, the chief,
Fierce as the dragon when the mid-day sun (25)

(25) The whole description of Tydeus is in the boldest style and strongest louring of Æschylus. The serpent lying in a torpid state during the winter, is supposed to have his rage increased by heat; hence this glowing description of him by Virgil:

> Postquam exhausta palus, terræque ardore dehiscunt,
> Exilit in siccum, et flammantia lumina torquens
> Sævit agris, asperque siti, atque exterritus æstu.
>
> Georg. 3. v. 432

> But when in muddy pools the water sinks,
> And the chopt earth is furrow'd o'er with chinks;
> He leaves the fens, and leaps upon the ground,
> And hissing rowls his glaring eyes around:
> With thirst inflamed, impatient of the heats,
> He rages in the fields, and wide destruction threats.—DRYDEN.

Ovid has with peculiar judgement seized this idea, and carried it to the north pole:

> Quæque polo posita est glaciali proxima serpens,
> Frigore pigra prius, neque formidabilis ulli,
> Incaluit, sumpsitque novas fervoribus iras.
>
> Met. l. 2. v. 173

Calls forth his glowing terrors, raves aloud,
Reviles the sage, as forming tim'rous league
With war and fate. Frowning he speaks, and shakes
The dark crest streaming o'er his shaded helm
In triple wave; whilst dreadful ring around
The brazen bosses of his shield, impress'd
With this proud argument. A sable sky
Burning with stars; and in the midst full-orb'd
A silver moon, the eye of night, o'er all
Awful in beauty pours her peerless light.
Clad in these proud habiliments, he stands
Close to the river's margin, and with shouts
Demands the war, like an impatient steed,
That pants upon the foaming curb, and waits
With fiery expectation the known signal,
Swift at the trumpet's sound to burst away.
Before the Prætian gate, its bars remov'd,
What equal chief wilt thou appoint against him?

ETEOCLES.

This military pride, it moves not me!
The gorgeous blazonry of arms, the crest
High waving o'er the helm, the roaring boss,
Harmless without the spear, imprint no wound.
The sable night, spangled with golden stars,
On his proud shield impress'd, perchance may prove

> The folded serpent next the frozen pole,
> Stiff and benumb'd before, began to roll,
> And raged with inward heat, and threaten'd war,
> And shot a redder light from every star.—ADDISON.

Statius could not omit this circumstance, though his immense dragon was a very quiet animal:

> Sævior anfractu laterum sinuosa retorquens
> Terga solo, siccique nocens furit igne veneni.
>
> Theb. l. 5.

A gloomy presage. Should the shades of night
Fall on his dying eyes, the boastful charge
May to the bearer be deem'd ominous,
And he the prophet of his own destruction.
Against his rage the son of Astacus,
That breathes deliberate valour, at that gate
Will I appoint commander; bent on deeds
Of glory, but a votary at the shrine
Of modesty, he scorns the arrogant vaunt
As base, but bids brave actions speak his worth.
The flow'r of that bold stem, which from the ground (26)
Rose arm'd, and fell not in the deathful fight,
Is Menalippus; him his parent earth
Claims as her own, and in her natural right
Calls him to guard her from the hostile spear:
But the brave deed the die of war decides.

CHORUS.

Go then, my guardian hero, go;
And may each fav'ring god with bright success
Thy gen'rous valour bless:
For at thy country's dear command
Thou arm'st thy righteous hand,
To pour her vengeance on the foe.
Yet my sad heart must sigh,
When on the blood-empurpled ground,
Gored with many a gaping wound,
I see my dearest friends expiring lie.

SOLDIER.

May the gods crown his valiant toil with conquest.
But Capaneus against th' Electran gates

(26) As Menalippus here and Megareus were of the dragon-race, that sprung armed from the earth, there is a peculiar propriety in calling them forth to defend that earth, and repay that nouriture she gave them.

Takes his allotted post, and tow'ring stands
Vast as the earth-born giants, and inflam'd
To more than mortal daring: horribly
He menaces the walls; may Heav'n avert
His impious rage! vaunts that, the gods assenting
Or not assenting, his strong hand shall rend
Their rampires down; that e'en the rage of Jove
Descending on the field should not restrain him.
His lightnings, and his thunders wing'd with fire
He likens to the sun's meridian heat.
On his proud shield portray'd, A naked man
Waves in his hand a blazing torch (27); beneath
In golden letters, I WILL FIRE THE CITY.
Against this man—But who shall dare t' engage
His might, and dauntless his proud rage sustain?

ETEOCLES.

Advantage from advantage here arises.
The arrogant vaunts, which man's vain tongue throws out,
Shall on himself recoil. This haughty chief
Threats high, and prompt to execute his threats
Spurns at the gods, opes his unhallow'd lips
In shallow exultations, hurls on high,
Weak mortal as he is, 'gainst Jove himself
Hurls his extravagant and wild defiance.

(27) Stanley allows that this insigne may be supposed to allude to an ancient custom in use before the invention of trumpets, where the torch-bearer, sacred to Mars, by stepping into the middle space between the two armies, used to brandish it as a signal for the onset. The man being naked marks the contempt with which Capaneus treated the enemy, and implies that he needed no arms to attack and fire the city.—R. P. JODRELL.

These observations are in the genuine spirit of criticism, and shows great penetration and judgement: Euripides could give this torch-bearer the name of Prometheus only as a metonymy; and from this custom arose that bold metaphor which we shall find in the Persians, Σάλπιγξ αὐτῇ ἐπέφλεγεν, and the Martemque accendere cantu of Virgil.

On him, I trust, the thunder wing'd with fire (28),
Far other than the sun's meridian heat,
Shall roll its vengeance. But against his pride,
Insolent vaunter, shall the glowing spirit,
That burns for glory in the daring breast
Of Polyphontes, be oppos'd: his arm,
Strong in Diana's tutelary aid,
Shall be a sure defence. But to thy tale;
Who next before our gates assumes his station?

CHORUS.

Yes, let him perish, the proud foe,
That storms, in savage hope, the vanquish'd town,
And rends its rampires down.
Him first may heav'n's almighty Sire,
Rolling his vengeful fire,
Dash in the flaming ruin low;
Ere his impetuous spear
Bursts ev'ry bar of my retreat,
And from my virgin seat
Drags me perforce from all my soul holds dear.

SOLDIER.

Third from the brazen helm leap'd forth the lot
Of fierce Eteoclus, who takes his post
Against the gates of Neis: there he whirls
His fiery-neighing steeds, that toss their heads
Proud of their nodding plumes, eager to rush

(28) There is a noble spirit of religious confidence in this assertion; it deserves to be mentioned, that this impious boaster perished by that lightning which he thus defied.—R. P. JODRELL.

The learned reader will find a bold and spirited narrative of the daring actions of this hero, and his death, at the end of the tenth book of the Thebaïd of Statius, a writer whose fiery genius sometimes overleaped judgement, but who compensates for this with

Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.

Against the gates, and snorting champ their curbs
Boss'd with barbaric pride. No mean device
Is sculptur'd on his shield, A man in arms,
His ladder fix'd against the enemies' walls,
Mounts, resolute to rend their rampires down;
And cries aloud, the letters plainly mark'd,
NOT MARS HIMSELF SHALL BEAT ME FROM THE TOW'RS.
Appoint of equal hardihood some chief
To guard the city from the servile yoke.

ETEOCLES.

Such shall I send, to conquest send him; one
That bears not in his hand this pageantry
Of martial pride. The hardy Megareus,
From Creon sprung, and that bold race, which rose
Embattled from the earth: him from the gates
The furious neighings of the fiery steeds
Affright not; but his blood spilt on the earth
Amply requites the nouriture she gave him,
Or captive both, the man in arms, the town
Storm'd on the sculptur'd shield, and the proud bearer,
Shall with their spoils adorn his father's house.

CHORUS.

Go then, and glory be thy guide!
For thee, brave youth, we pour this ardent pray'r,
And fav'ring Heav'n shall hear.
Go then, my house's guardian, go,
And rushing on the foe,
Bravely repel their vaunting pride.
And as each furious soul
Hurls the ferocious menace high,
May he, that rules the sky,
In vengeance his indignant eye-balls roll!

SOLDIER.

At the next gate, nam'd from the martial goddess
Onca Minerva, stands Hippomedon (29).
I heard his thund'ring voice, I saw his form
In bulk and stature proudly eminent;
I saw him roll his shield, large, massy, round,
Of broad circumference: it struck my soul
With terror. On its orb no vulgar artist
Express'd this image, A Typhæus huge,
Disgorging from his foul enfoulder'd jaws,
In fierce effusion, wreaths of dusky smoke,
Signal of kindling flames: its bending verge
With folds of twisted serpents border'd round.
With shouts the giant-chief provokes the war;
And in the ravings of outrageous valour
Glares terror from his eyes. Behoves thee then
Strong opposition to his fiery rage,
Which at the gates e'en now spreads wild dismay.

ETEOCLES.

First, Onca Pallas, holding near the gates (30)
Her hallow'd state, abhors his furious rage;

(29) Of the other gates we find no satisfactory account to lay before the reader: but the scholiast here observes, that Onca was one of the titles of Minerva at Thebes, which Cadmus introduced from Phœnicia, where she was so called. The scholiast on the second Olympic ode of Pindar asserts, that Cadmus erected at Ὄγκαι, a village in Bœotia, a statue of Pallas, who was therefore worshipped under the title of Ὀγκάια; see also the scholiast on Lycophron, v. 1225. She had two temples at Thebes, from which she had two titles, Oncæa and Ismenia; the latter certainly derived from the river Ismenus. See Œdip. Tyr. Sophoclis, v. 20. on which the scholiast gives Οἰκάια by mistake for Ογκάια.

R. P. JODRELL.

(30) The Scholiast on v. 170. interprets this to allude to a picture, perhaps a statue of the protecting goddess placed at the entrance of the city, and quotes Lycophron for her name of Πύλαιτις so acquired.—Alexan. l. 354.—whose Scholiast observes, that it has a symbolical meaning, and implied that wisdom should be always at their gates and doors.—R. P. JODRELL.

And in her guardian care shall crush the pride
Of this fell dragon. Then the son of Ænops,
Hyperbius, of approv'd and steady valour,
Shall man to man oppose him; one that dares
Assay his fate in the rough shock of battle;
In form, in spirit, and in martial arms
Consummate; such high grace Hermes conferr'd.
In hostile arms thus man shall combat man,
And to the battle on their sculptur'd shields
Bring adverse gods; the fierce Typhæus he,
Breathing forth flakes of fire; Hyperbius bears
The majesty of Jove securely thron'd,
Grasping his flaming bolt: and who e'er saw
The Thund'rer vanquish'd? In the fellowship
Of friendly gods, the conquerors are with us,
They with the conquer'd; and with like event
These warriors shall engage; as Jove in fight
Subdued the fell Typhæus, so his form
Emblazon'd on the shield shall guard Hyperbius.

CHORUS.

If aught of truth my soul inspires,
This chief, that tow'ring o'er th' affrighted field
Bears on his sculptur'd shield
Th' enormous monster, buried deep
Beneath a mountainous heap,
Rolling in vain his turbid fires,
Monster accurs'd, abhorr'd
By gods above, by men below;
This chief his head shall bow
Low at the gate beneath the victor's sword.

SOLDIER.

Prophetic be thy hopes. At the north gate,
Yet hear me, king, the fifth bold warrior takes

His station, near the tomb where honour'd lies
Jove-born Amphion (31): by his spear he swears,
Which, as he grasps, he dares to venerate (32)
More than a god, and dearer to his eyes
Than the sweet light of heav'n: by this he swears,
To level with the ground the walls of Thebes,
Though Jove himself oppose him. Thus exclaims
This beauteous branch sprung from a mountain nymph (33),
Blooming in manly youth; the tender down
Of unripe age scarce sprouting on his cheek;
But ruthless are his thoughts, cruel his eye,
And proudly vaunting at the gate he takes
His terrible stand. Upon his clashing shield,
Whose orb sustains the storm of war, he bears
The foul disgrace of Thebes, a rav'nous sphinx,
Fix'd to the plates; the burnish'd monster round
Pours a portentous gleam: beneath her lies
A Theban, mangled by her cruel fangs.
'Gainst this let each brave arm direct the spear.
No hireling he, to prostitute for gold (34)
The war, or shame the length of way he trod,

(31) Amphion, the son of Jupiter and Antiopa, having received a lute from Mercury, was so excellent a musician, that according to the fable, he brought the stones together with which the tower of Thebes was built: hence Horace calls him Thebanæ conditor arcis.—R. P Jodrell.

(32) Statius with more reason assigns this impiety to Capaneus, who is represented as a contemptor divum, like Mezentius; the one says, Virtus mihi numen, et ensis, quem teneo; the other

Dextra mihi deus, et telum, quod missile libro
Adsint.

(33) This mountain nymph was the Arcadian Atalanta.

(34) Ὀυ καπηλέυσειν μάχην. Ennius expresses the same idea under the same metaphor,

Non cauponantes bellum, sed belligerantes.

E'en from Arcadia: such this stranger comes
Parthenopæus, and repays to Argos
Its hospitable honours, 'gainst these tow'rs
Breathing proud menaces. The gods avert them!

ETEOCLES.

That ruin, which their fierce aspiring thoughts
With impious vaunts intend, may the just gods
Turn on themselves, total defeat, and shame;
So let them perish! To this proud Arcadian
No boaster we oppose; but one whose hand
Knows its rough work, Actor, the valiant brother
Of him last named. Never will he permit
The tongue, without th' assay of warlike deeds,
To rush within the gates, and execute
Its ruinous threats; nor him, whose hostile shield
Bears sculptur'd that abhorr'd and rav'ning beast:
And many a thund'ring stroke with stern rebuke
Shall check her proud advances to the walls.
Soon shall the fav'ring gods confirm these hopes.

CHORUS.

These words appal my throbbing breast:
And the light tangles of my braided hair
Rise upright with my fear,
As from the impious foes around
These dreadful voices sound,
Furious with thund'ring threats exprest.
Ye pow'rs, that rule on high,
Scatter their dreaded forces wide,
Or let their crested pride
Low in the dust beneath our rampires lie!

SOLDIER.

The sixth brave chief, that with the golden curb
Of prudence knows to check his gen'rous valour.

The fate-foretelling seer, Amphiaraus (35),
At th' Omolæan gate (36) his destin'd post
Assumes in arms, and on the fiery Tydeus
Throws many' a keen reproach, reviles him as
A homicide, the troubler of the state,
The mighty author of all ill to Argos,
With murder and the furies at his heels
Urging Adrastus to these hateful deeds.
Thy brother Polynices, with him leagued
In these despiteful deeds, he blames aloud,
Descants upon his name, and thus rebukes him,
How grateful to the gods must this deed be,
Glorious to hear, and in the roll of fame
Shining to distant ages, thus to lead
These foreign arms to waste thy bleeding country,
To raise those princely mansions, where thy fathers,
Heroes and demigods, once held their seats!
But say thy cause be just, will justice dry
Thy mother's tears? And when the furious spear,

(35) This modest and amiable augur had foretold the ill success of the war, and the death of all the chiefs, Adrastus only excepted; he would therefore have concealed himself, but was betrayed by his wife Eriphyle, who had passionately desired some female ornament, which Polynices had given to Argia upon the day of their marriage: this was a necklace, or rather a cestus, the work of Vulcan, and by him presented to Harmonia when she wedded Cadmus, and had been fatal to her, to Semele, and to Jocasta. See Statius, l. 2. v. 272, &c.

Sic Eriphyleos aurum fatale penates
Irrupit, scelerumque ingentia semina movit,
Et grave Tysiphone risit gavisa futuris.

As Amphiaraus was fighting bravely, the earth opened beneath him, and he descended alive to the infernal regions with all his arms, and in his chariot. Statius has exerted the utmost force of his genius in describing this righteous hero.

(36) The Thessalians gave the feasts of Ceres the name of Omolôia, des deux mots, Omou ensemble, and Lôion meilleur, excellent.—Histoire religieuse du Calandrier, par M. Court de Gebelin. The Scholiast tells us, that these gates were so called from Omolois, a daughter of Niobe.

Hurl'd by thy hand, shall pierce thy country's bosom,
Will she with friendly arms again receive thee?
Prescient of fate I shall enrich this soil,
Sunk in the hostile plain. But let us fight.
One thing at least is mine: I will not find
A vulgar, or dishonourable death.
So spoke the prophet; and with awful port
Advanc'd his massy shield, the shining orb
Bearing no impress: for his gen'rous soul
Wishes to be, not to appear, the best;
And from the culture of his modest worth
Bears the rich fruit of great and glorious deeds.
Him let the virtuous and the wise oppose;
For dreadful is the foe that fears the gods.

ETEOCLES.

I mourn the destiny, that blends the just
With these unhallow'd wretches. Nothing worse
In whate'er cause, than impious fellowship;
Nothing of good is reap'd; for when the field
Is sown with wrong, the ripen'd fruit is death.
If with a desperate band, whose hearts are hot
With villany, the pious hoists his sails,
The vengeance of the gods bursts on the bark
And sinks him with the heav'n-detested crew.
If midst a race, inhospitably bent
On savage deeds, regardless of the gods,
The just man fix his seat, th' impending wrath
Spares not, but strikes him with vindictive fury,
Crush'd in the general ruin. So this seer,
Of temper'd wisdom, of unsullied honour,
Just, good, and pious, and a mighty prophet,
In despite to his better judgement join'd
With men of impious daring, bent to tread

The long, irremeable way, with them
Shall, if high Jove assist us, be dragg'd down
To joint perdition. Ne'er shall he advance
Against our gates, withheld not by base fear,
Or cowardice of soul; but that he knows
His fate, if Phœbus aught of truth foretells,
To fall in fight: he loves then to be silent,
Since what the time demands he cannot speak,
Yet him against the strength of Lasthenes,
Who from the stranger's inroad guards our gates,
Shall I oppose: in manhood's vig'rous prime
He bears the providence of age; his eye
Quick as the lightning's glance; before his shield
Flames his protended spear (37), and longs t' obey
His hand. But victory is the gift of Heav'n.

CHORUS.

That gift, ye great immortal pow'rs,
On the brave guardians of our state bestow:
On each victorious brow
The radiant honour bind! Oh, hear
A virgin's pious pray'r;
Chase the proud strangers from our tow'rs;
Or headlong let them fall,
Thy red right hand, almighty sire,
Rolling its vengeful fire,
In flaming ruin stretch'd beneath our wall!

SOLDIER.

The seventh bold chief—Forgive me that I name
Thy brother, and relate the horrible vows,
The imprecations, which his rage pours forth

(37) Amidst the obscurity of this passage, and the uncertainty of the annotators, the translator has selected that idea which seems most poetical.

Against the city; on fire to mount the walls,
And from their turrets to this land proclaim,
Rending its echoes with the song of war,
Captivity: to meet thee sword to sword,
Kill thee, then die upon thee: if thou livest,
T' avenge on thee his exile and disgrace
With the like treatment. Thund'ring vengeance thus
The rage of Polynices calls the gods,
Presiding o'er his country, to look down,
And aid his vows. His well-orb'd shield he holds,
New-wrought, and with a double impress charg'd:
A warrior, blazing all in golden arms,
A female form of modest aspect leads,
Expressing justice, as th' inscription speaks,
YET ONCE MORE TO HIS COUNTRY, AND ONCE MORE
TO HIS PATERNAL THRONE I WILL RESTORE HIM.
Such their devices. But th' important task,
Whom to oppose against his force, is thine.
Let not my words offend: I but relate,
Do thou command; for thou art sov'reign here.

ETEOCLES.

How dreadful is the hatred of the gods(38)!
Unhappy sons of Œdipus, your fate
Claims many' a tear. Ah me! my father's curse
Now stamps its vengeance deep. But to lament,

(38) At the mention of each of the other chiefs Eteocles had shown himself unmoved, and given his orders with calmness and prudence; nay, his reflections on Amphiaraus have a solemn air of religion: but no sooner is his brother named, than he loses all temper; he begins indeed as if he would lament the unhappy fate of his family, but soon starts from that idea, and, though himself the aggressor, reviles his brother as insolent, outrageous, and unjust from his infancy; then in the spirit of a man that has done an injury, who never forgives, works himself up to that ungoverned rage, which destroyed his brother, himself, and all the unhappy family of Œdipus.

Or sigh, or shed the tear, becomes me not,
Lest more intolerable grief arise.
Be Polynices told, ill-omen'd name,
Soon shall we see how far his blazon'd shield
Avails; how far inscriptions wrought in gold,
With all their futile vauntings, will restore him.
If justice, virgin daughter of high Jove,
Had ever form'd his mind, or rul'd his actions,
This might have been: but neither when his eyes
First saw the light of life; nor in the growth
Of infancy; nor in th' advancing years
Of youth; nor in the riper age, that clothes
With gradual down the manly cheek, did justice
E'er deign t' instruct, or mark him for her own.
Nor now, I ween in this his fell intent
To crush his country will her presence aid him:
For justice were not justice, should she favour
Th' injurious outrage of his daring spirit.
In this confiding I will meet his arms
In armed opposition: Who more fit?
Chief shall engage with chief, with brother brother,
And foe with foe. Haste, arm me for the fight,
Bring forth my greaves, my hauberk, my strong spear.

CHORUS.

Dear to thy country, son of Œdipus,
Be not thy rage like his, whom we abhor.
Thebes has no dearth of valiant sons t' oppose
These Argives; and their blood may be aton'd;
The death of brothers by each other slain,
That stain no expiation can atone.

ETEOCLES.

Could man endure defeat without dishonour,
'Twere well: but to the dead nothing remains,

Save glory: to the dastard, and the base
Fame never pays that honourable meed.

CHORUS.

Ah! whither dost thou rush? Let not revenge,
That wildly raving shakes the furious spear,
Transport thee thus. Check this hot tide of passion.

ETEOCLES.

No: since the god impels me, I will on.
And let the race of Laius, let them all,
Abhorr'd by Phœbus, in this storm of fate
Sink down to deep Cocytus' dreary flood.

CHORUS.

Cruel and murd'rous is the rage that fires thee
To deeds of death, to unpermitted blood;
And sorrow is the bitter fruit it yields.

ETEOCLES.

My father's curse, a stern relentless fury,
Rolling her tearless eyes, looks on and tells me
Glory pursues her prize, disdaining fate.

CHORUS.

Ah, rave not thus: Fame will not call thee base
Or cowardly, if well thy life be order'd.
The gloomy fury enters not his house,
Whose hands present th' accepted sacrifice.

ETEOCLES.

The gods accept not us; and on our fall
Glory attends admiring: why then sue
For grace, with servile fear cringing to death?

CHORUS.

For that it is at hand: its terrible pow'r
Sooth'd by th' abatement of this fiery valour,
May come perchance more gentle; now it rages.

ETEOCLES.

My father's imprecations rage, and haunt
My sleep: too true the real visions rise,
And wave the bloody sword that parts his kingdoms.

CHORUS.

Let us persuade thee, though thou scorn'st our sex.

ETEOCLES.

What would thy wish have done? Speak it in brief.

CHORUS.

Ah! go not this way: go not to this gate.

ETEOCLES.

My soul's on fire; nor shall thy words retard me.

CHORUS.

Conquest that spurns at right offends the gods.

ETEOCLES.

Ill suit these tame words the arm'd warrior's ear.

CHORUS.

And canst thou wish to spill thy brother's blood?

ETEOCLES.

By the just gods he shall not 'scape my vengeance (39).

CHORUS.

She comes, the fierce tremendous pow'r (40),
And harrows up my soul with dread;
No gentle goddess, prompt to show'r
Her blessings on some favour'd head.

(39) The English reader will allow, that in variety of character and dignity of expression this is one of the finest scenes ever produced by a dramatic author. The devices on the shields, the spirit of the warriors, and the defiance of Eteocles, all proclaim that wonderful δεινοτής, or tragic sublimity, which characterized Æschylus. What can we think then of the unfeeling criticism of P. Brumoy? who says, Cette scene est fort longue, et n'a pu être interessante que pour les Atheniens qui connoissoient Thebes, et les chefs, dont on va parler.

R. P. JODRELL.

(40) As soon as Œdipus came to be informed that he had killed his father Laius, and that Jocasta, by whom he had two sons and two daughters, was his mother, in the transport of his grief he tore out his eyes. When his sons were

I know her now, the prophetess of ill,
And vengeance ratifies each word,
The votive fury, fiend abhorr'd
The father's curses to fulfil
Dreadful she comes, and with her brings
The brood of fate, that laps the blood of kings.

The rude barbarian, from the mines
Of Scythia, o'er the lots presides;
Ruthless to each his share assigns,
And the contested realm divides:
To each allots no wider a domain
Than, on the cold earth as they lie,
Their breathless bodies occupy,
Regardless of an ampler reign.
Such narrow compass does the sword,
A cruel umpire, their high claims afford.

Conflicting thus in furious mood,
Should each by other's hand be slain;
Should the black fountain of their blood
Spout forth, and drench the thirsty plain;

grown up to man's estate, they shut up their father, now old and blind, and agreed to divide his kingdom between them. Œdipus deeply resented this treatment, and uttered the most horrid execrations against them, praying that they might divide the kingdom by the sword. Statius knew how to make a fine use of this. How fatal a father's curse was esteemed, we have seen in the Prometheus. To prevent its dreaded effects, the brothers agreed to reign each a year alternately, and each alternately to leave the kingdom. Eteocles, as the elder, first assumed the sovereignty; but upon the expiration of his year refused to resign it to his brother: hence this war, their father's prophetic curse which is greatly represented through this tragedy as an avenging fury: even the sword is personified, and represented as a rude barbarian from the mines of Scythia, and advancing over the seas, attended with mischief and war, as a cruel umpire to divide the kingdom between the brothers, but assigning to each no larger a share than their dead bodies could occupy on the earth. These are the conceptions of a genius truly sublime, and which distinguish Æschylus and Shakespeare from all other writers.

Who shall the solemn expiation pay?
Who with pure lavers cleanse the dead?
Miseries to miseries thus succeed,
And vengeance marks this house her prey,
Swift to chastise the first ill deed;
And the son's sons in her deep fury bleed.

The first ill deed from Laius sprung:
Thrice from his shrine these words of fate
Awful the Pythian Phœbus sung,
"Die childless, wouldst thou save the state."
Urg'd by his friends, as round the free wine flows,
To Love's forbidden rites he flies.
By the son's hand the father dies.
He in the chaste ground, whence he arose,
Was bold t' implant the deadly root;
And madness rear'd each baleful-spreading shoot.

Wide o'er misfortune's surging tide
Billows succeeding billows spread;
Should one, its fury spent, subside,
Another lifts its boist'rous head,
And foams around the city's shatter'd prow.
But should the rough tempestuous wave
Force through our walls too slight to save
And lay the thin partition low,
Will not the flood's resistless sway
Sweep kings and people, town and realms away?

The dreadful curse pronounc'd of old
To vengeance rouses ruthless hate;
And slaughter, ranging uncontroll'd,
Pursues the hideous work of fate.

Wreck'd in the storm the great, the brave, the wise
Are sunk beneath the roaring tide.
Such was the chief, this city's pride,
Dear to each god in yon bright skies,
Whose prudence took our dread away,
The rav'ning monster gorg'd with human prey.

Where now the chief? His glories where?
Fall'n, fall'n. From the polluted bed
Indignant madness, wild despair,
And agonizing grief succeed.
The light of heav'n, himself, his sons abhorr'd,
Darkling he feeds his gloomy rage,
Bids them, with many' a curse, engage,
And part their empire with the sword.
That curse now holds its unmov'd state,
The furious fiend charg'd with the work of fate.

SOLDIER, CHORUS.

SOLDIER.

Have comfort, virgins, your fond parents' joy;
The city hath escap'd the servile yoke,
And the proud vaunts of these impetuous men
Are fall'n; the storm is ceas'd, and the rough waves,
That threaten'd to o'erwhelm us, are subsided.
Our tow'rs stand firm, each well-appointed chief
Guarded his charge with manly fortitude.
All at six gates is well: but at the seventh
The god, to whom that mystic number's sacred (41),

(41) Ἑξδομαγέται· Ἀπόλλων.——ἑξδόμη, ἱερὸν ἦμαρ,
Τῇ γὰρ Ἀπόλλωνα χρυσάορα γείνατο Λητώ.

Hesiod tells us here that the seventh is a sacred day, because on that day Latona brought forth Apollo with the golden sword, M. Court de Gebelin says with the golden hair, à chevelure dorée. That the seventh day of each month was sacred

Royal Apollo, took his awful stand,
Repaying on the race of Œdipus
The ill-advis'd transgression of old Laius.

CHORUS.

What new affliction hath befall'n the city?

SOLDIER.

The city is preserv'd: the brother kings
Are fall'n, each slaughter'd by the other's hand.

CHORUS.

Who? What? Thy words distract my sense with fear.

SOLDIER.

Be calm, and hear. The sons of Œdipus.

CHORUS.

Ah me! I am the prophetess of ill.

SOLDIER.

It is indeed too certain: both are dead.

CHORUS.

Came they to this? 'Tis horrible; yet tell me.

to Apollo, because he was born on that day, was true only in the allegorical sense: this was taken from the philosophical ideas of the Egyptians, brought into Greece by Pythagoras, respecting the harmony of the universe, founded on the seven planets and their relations, and in general upon the number seven. Nonnus gives the planets the same arrangements which they have in the musical system of the Egyptians, where the sun placed in the fourth rank, or in the middle of the progression, terminates and begins the two quaternions, or fours, that form the system.—Gebelin's Allegories Orientales, p. 90. Milton knew how to make the finest use of this idea of the harmony of the spheres,

How often from the steep
Of echoing hill, or thicket, have we heard
Celestial voices, to the midnight air
(Sole, or responsive to each other's note)
Singing their great Creator? oft in bands
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
With heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds,
In *full harmonic number* join'd, their songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heav'n.

P. L. b. iv. l. 680.

SOLDIER.

Brother by brother's hands dreadfully slain.

CHORUS.

And has one common fate involv'd them both?

SOLDIER.

It has indeed destroy'd th' unhappy race.
Here then is cause for lamentation, cause
For joy: joy, that the city stands secure;
But lamentation, that the chiefs are fall'n.
To both the rigid steel, forg'd in the mines
Of Scythia, shares their whole inheritance;
And each receives but that small tract of earth,
Which serves him for a tomb; their father's curse,
Fatally cruel, sweeps them both away.
The city is preserv'd; but the dust drinks
The blood of the' brothers, each by th' other slain.

CHORUS.

MONOSTROPHE.

O Jove supreme,
And all ye gods that guard this state,
Should I the joyful Pæan raise,
And celebrate your praise?
Your guardian care, propitious pow'rs,
Preserv'd our walls, preserv'd our tow'rs!
Or bid the solemn, doleful strain
Lament the chiefs, the brothers slain;
A mournful theme;
Through mad ambition's impious pride
Childless, unbless'd, in youth's warm tide
Fall'n, fall'n by too severe a fate?

STROPHE.

Thou gloomy curse, too prompt to ill,
A father's vengeance to fulfil,
I feel, I feel thee in my shiv'ring breast!
Soon as I heard th' unhappy slain
Lay welt'ring on th' ensanguin'd plain,
With inspiration's raging pow'r possest,
I form'd the funeral strains to flow
With all the melody of wo.

ANTISTROPHE.

Thou fell, ill-omen'd, cruel spear,
Couldst thou the father's curses hear,
And wing'd with fury drink the brothers' gore?
Now, Laius, boast the frantic deed;
Thy disobedience has its meed;
The fatal oracle delays no more.
These are your works; and round them stand
Horrors, and death's avenging band.

EPODE.

Is this a tale of fear-created wo?
In very deed before our eyes

[The dead bodies of ETEOCLES and POLYNICES are here brought on the stage.]

A twofold scene of misery lies,
And from a double slaughter double horrors flow;
Whilst grief on grief, and groan on groan
Rush in, and make this house their own.
Come then, ye virgins, form the mournful bands,
To wail the mighty slain;
And ever and anon, at each sad pause
The dying cadence draws
Together smite your high-rais'd hands,

The sullen sound attemper'd to the strain,
That with many' a dismal note
Accompanies the sable boat,
Slow as its sails on Acheron's dull stream,
Wafting its joyless numbers o'er
To that unlovely, dreary shore,
Which Phœbus never views, nor the light's golden beam.

1st SEMICHORUS.

But see, to aid this mournful office come
Antigone and Ismene: they besure
Will, from their lovely gentleness of soul,
Pour for their brothers' loss their sorrows wild.
Behoves us then, ere the sad tale shall reach
Their ear, with meet solemnity to raise
The thrilling strain, and chant the hymn of death.

2d SEMICHORUS.

Unhappy in your brothers, most unhappy
Of all that o'er their swelling bosoms bind
The decent vest, I weep, I breathe the sigh
Warm from my heart, that feels for your afflictions.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

1st SEMICHORUS.

Ah! what frantic rage possest
Each unyielding, ruthless breath,
Wisdom scorn'd, and friends defy'd,
By threat'ning ills unterrify'd,
'Gainst their father's house to bear,
Wretched they, the fatal spear!

2d SEMICHORUS.

Wretched they a wretched death
Found their house's fall beneath.

1st SEMICHORUS.

Each the ruin'd palace o'er
Strove t' extend his envied pow'r:
Each unrivall'd and alone
Proudly strove to seize the throne.
But the sword their contest ends,
Not the lovely strife of friends.
Hate, that never knows remorse,
Fury of the father's curse,
Through their sides with horrid sway
Urg'd the sharp steel's purple way

2d SEMICHORUS.

Charg'd with death thou cruel curse,
Each hath felt thy fatal force.

1st SEMICHORUS.

Brother pierc'd by brother dies,
Low their house in ruin lies.

2d SEMICHORUS.

From the father's furious breath
Discord rose, and rage, and death.

1st SEMICHORUS.

Grief with wild, distracted air
Through the city leads despair;
The tow'rs on high, the vales below,
Sigh the sullen notes of wo.
To other lords the large domains,
And the envied pow'r remains;
Of the territories wide,
For which they fought, for which they died,
Each receives an equal share,
Fiercely parted by the spear:
Cruel arbiter of fate,
Friends thy rude decisions hate.

2d SEMICHORUS.

Pierc'd with steel each finds his end:
Pierc'd with steel they haste t' attend
Their fathers, by like bloody death,
In the yawning grave beneath.

1st SEMICHORUS.

Grief, that rends the tortur'd breast,
Deep with real woes possest,
Tears fast streaming from her eyes
From the haunts of pleasure flies,
Anguish, misery all her own,
Sadly pours the hollow groan;
Whilst the ruin'd palace round
Echo answers to the sound;
And, each frightful pause between,
From her airy shell unseen,
Listens to the funeral strain,
Wailing the unhappy slain;
Wailing all the dreadful woes
That from madding discord rose;
Many' a friend among the dead,
Whilst the hostile legions bleed.

2d SEMICHORUS.

Far beyond each sorrowing dame,
Each that bears a mother's name,
Each that groans upon the earth,
Hapless she that gave them birth.
She, to share her bed and throne,
As a husband took her son:
These she bore, and this their fate,
Brother slain by brother's hate.

ISMENE.

Brothers they, by birth allied,
Spread the mutual carnage wide:
Unfriendly each to other's life,
In the madding rage of strife.
But their hatred is no more,
On the earth, all stain'd with gore,
Their stream of life unites, and shows
From one common source it rose.

CHORUS.

Umpire of the strife of kings,
Forth the barbarous stranger springs:
Ruthless issuing from the flame
O'er the seas the keen steel came.
Ruthless came the realm to share,
Big with mischief, wasting war,
And accurs'd, without remorse,
Executes a father's curse.

ANTIGONE.

They have the wretched share they chose,
Share of heav'n-appointed woes (42):
And the rich, contested prize
Deep beneath earth's bosom lies.

ISMENE.

It falls, the royal house, it falls;
Ruin lords it o'er its walls;
And the furies howl around,
Notes of shrill, soul-piercing sound.
Slaughter, reeking yet with gore,
Raises high each gate before,

(42) This passage is inexplicably obscure. The translator is obliged to leave it so.

Where they fought, and where they bled,
Trophies of the mighty dead;
And, the rival chiefs subdued,
Ceases from her work of blood.

ANTIGONE.

Wounded thou gav'st the fatal wound.

ISMENE.

Dying thy hand its vengeance found.

ANTIGONE.

By the spear 'twas thine to kill.

ISMENE.

And the spear's thy blood to spill.

ANTIGONE.

Fierce thy thought, and fell thy deed.

ISMENE.

Fierce recoil'd it on thy head.

ANTIGONE.

Flow my tears.

ISMENE.

My sorrows flow.

ANTIGONE.

He that slew shall lie as low.
Madness mingles with my moans.

ISMENE.

Heaves my heart, and bursts with groans.

ANTIGONE.

Thou shalt claim the ceaseless tear.

ISMENE.

To my soul wast thou most dear.

ANTIGONE.

Thee thy friend stretch'd on the plain.

ISMENE.

And by thee thy friend is slain.

ANTIGONE.

Twice to see.

ISMENE.

And twice to tell.

ANTIGONE.

Near us do these sorrows dwell.

ISMENE.

Near us dwell these sorrows, near
As to sisters brothers are.

ANTIGONE.

Fate, in all thy terrors clad,
Œdipus, thy awful shade,
Erinnys, frowning black as night,
Dreadful, dreadful is your might!

ISMENE.

Fierce from flight achiev'd he deeds,
At which my heart with anguish bleeds.

ANTIGONE.

Nor is he returned that slew.

ISMENE.

Safe himself, on death he flew.

ANTIGONE.

Death upon himself he brought.

ISMENE.

And to him destruction wrought.

ANTIGONE.

Sprung from an unhappy line.

ISMENE.

In one unhappy fate they join.

ANTIGONE.

Mournful, threefold misery.

ISMENE.

Sad to tell.

ANTIGONE.

And sad to see.
Fate in all thy terrors clad,
Œdipus, thy awful shade,
Erinnys, frowning black as night,
Dreadful, dreadful is your might!
Thou their pow'r hast past, hast known.

ISMENE.

Soon this knowledge was thy own.

ANTIGONE.

To the town advancing near.

ISMENE.

Lifting high thy purple spear,
Burning fierce with enmity.

ANTIGONE.

Sad to tell.

ISMENE.

And sad to see.

ANTIGONE.

Ah, what woes on us await!

ISMENE.

And our house oppress'd with fate:
Through the land the evils spread,
Falling heaviest on my head.

ANTIGONE.

I th' afflicting burden share,
Equal sorrow, equal care.

ISMENE.

Eteocles, from thee it flows,
Author of these mournful woes.

ANTIGONE.

Each the gushing tear demands.

ISMENE.

Each with phrensy arm'd his hands.

ANTIGONE.

Where shall we with pious care
The sepulchral earth prepare?

ISMENE.

Where the hallow'd ground shall spread
Awful honours o'er the dead.

ANTIGONE.

Their unhappy father nigh
Let the mournful ruins lie.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS, HERALD.

HERALD.

My office leads me to proclaim the mandate
Of the great rulers of the Theban state.
Eteocles, for that he lov'd his country,
They have decreed with honour to inter.
To shield her from her foes he fought, he fell,
Her sacred rites rever'd, unstain'd with blame.
Where glory calls the valiant youth to bleed,
He bled. Thus far of him am I bid say.
Of Polynices, that his corpse shall lie
Cast out unburied, to the dogs a prey;
Because his spear, had not the gods oppos'd,
Threaten'd destruction to the lands of Thebes.
In death the vengeance of his country's gods
Pursues him, for he scorn'd them, and presum'd
To lead a foreign host, and storm the town.
Be this then his reward, to lie expos'd
To rav'nous birds, unhonour'd, of the rites (43)

(43) To be deprived of the rites of sepulture was to the ancients the greatest of all calamities, much worse than death itself. Euripides has a fine tragedy, the

That grace the dead, libations at the tomb,
The solemn strain, that 'midst the exequies
Breathes from the friendly voice of wo, depriv'd.
These are the mandates of the Theban rulers.

ANTIGONE.

And to these Theban rulers I declare,
If none besides dare bury him, myself
Will do that office, heedless of the danger,
And think no shame to disobey the state,
Paying the last sad duties to a brother.
Nature has tender ties, and strongly joins
The offspring of the same unhappy mother,
And the same wretched father. In this task
Shrink not, my soul, to share the ills he suffer'd,
Involuntary ills; and whilst life warms
This breast, be bold to show a sister's love
To a dead brother. Shall the famish'd wolves
Fatten on him? Away with such a thought.
I, though a woman, will prepare his tomb,
Dig up the earth, and bear it in this bosom,
In these fine folds to cover him. Go to.
I will not be oppos'd. Fruitful invention
Shall devise means to execute the task.

HERALD.

I charge thee not t' offend the state in this.

whole distress of which turns upon this idea; a translation of this will shortly be given to the public, and the reader may expect to find the subject more fully examined.—As the Chorus were by their office to be exact observers of the laws religious and civil, their task was here very nice and difficult. Not to assist in burying the dead, were impious: not to obey the mandates of their rulers, were an offence against the laws of their country: the poet with great judgement leaves this interesting point undetermined, in the only manner that remained not to give offence.

ANTIGONE.

I charge thee waste not words on me in vain.

HERALD.

Rage soon inflames a people freed from danger.

ANTIGONE.

Inflame them thou, he shall not lie unburied.

HERALD.

Wilt thou thus grace the object of their hate?

ANTIGONE.

Long have they strove to load him with dishonour.

HERALD.

Not till he shook this land with hostile arms.

ANTIGONE.

Great were his wrongs, and greatly he reveng'd them.

HERALD.

Injur'd by one, his vengeance burst on all.

ANTIGONE.

Discord, the meanest of the gods, will do
What she resolves; spare then thy tedious speech,
And be assur'd that I will bury him.

HERALD.

Self-will'd, and unadvis'd! I must declare this.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

1st SEMICHORUS.

With what a ruthless and destructive rage
The Furies hurl their vengeful shafts around,
And desolate the house of Œdipus!
What then remains for me? and how resolve?
Can I forbear to mourn thee, to attend thee
To the sad tomb? Yet duty to the state,
And reverence to its mandates, awes my soul.

Thou (44) shalt have many to lament thy fall:
Whilst he (45), unwept, unpitied, unattended,
Save by a sister's solitary sorrows,
Sinks to the shades. Approve you this resolve?

2nd SEMICHORUS.

To those that wail the fate of Polynices,
Let the state act its pleasure. We will go,
Attend his funeral rites, and aid his sister
To place him in the earth. Such sorrows move
The common feelings of humanity;
And, where the deed is just, the state approves it.

1st SEMICHORUS.

And we with him, as justice and the state
Concur to call us. Next th' immortal gods,
And Jove's high pow'r, this valiant youth came forth
The guardian of his country, and repell'd
Th' assault of foreign foes, whose raging force
Rush'd like a torrent threat'ning to o'erwhelm us.

(44) Eteocles. (45) Polynices.

AGAMEMNON.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

WATCHMAN.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

HERALD.

AGAMEMNON.

CASSANDRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS OF ARGIVE SENATORS.

AGAMEMNON.

In this tragedy the reader will find the strongest traces of the genius of Æschylus, and the most distinguishing proofs of his skill. Great in his conceptions, bold and daring in his metaphors, strong in his passions, he here touches the heart with uncommon emotions. The odes are particularly sublime, and the oracular spirit, that breathes through them, adds a wonderful elevation and dignity to them. Short as the part of Agamemnon is, the poet has the address to throw such an amiable dignity around him, that we soon become interested in his favour, and are predisposed to lament his fate. The character of Clytemnestra is finely marked; a high-spirited, artful, close, determined, dangerous woman. But the poet has no where exerted such efforts of his genius, as in the scene where Cassandra appears: as a prophetess, she gives every mark of the divine inspiration, from the dark and distant hint, through all the noble imagery of the prophetic enthusiasm; till, as the ca-

tastrophe advances, she more and more plainly declares it: as a suffering princess, her grief is plaintive, lively, and piercing; yet she goes to meet her death, which she clearly foretells, with a firmness worthy the daughter of Priam and the sister of Hector: nothing can be more animated or more interesting than this scene. The conduct of the poet through this play is exquisitely judicious; every scene gives us some obscure hint, or ominous presage, enough to keep our attention always raised, and to prepare us for the event; even the studied caution of Clytemnestra is finely managed to produce that effect; whilst the secrecy, with which she conducts her design, keeps us in suspense, and prevents a discovery, till we hear the dying groans of her murdered huband.

It is to be lamented that a late amiable poet, in his tragedy on this subject, which too he wished to have esteemed as classical, should have deviated so far from his great original, particularly in the character of Clytemnestra: but as he wanted strength of genius to imitate the noble simplicity of Æschylus, his taste led him to take Seneca for his model; and he has succeeded accordingly.

The scene of this play is at Argos, before the palace of Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON.

THE WATCHMAN (1).

YE fav'ring gods, relieve me from this toil:
Fix'd, as a dog, on Agamemnon's roof
I watch the live-long year, observing hence
The host of stars, that in the spangled skies
Take their bright stations, and to mortals bring
Winter and summer; radiant rulers, when
They set, or rising glitter through the night.
Here now I watch, if haply I may see
The blazing torch, whose flame brings news from Troy,

(1) This watchman had his station assigned him upon the royal palace at Argos, to observe the signal which Agamemnon had promised to give Clytemnestra, when Troy should be taken. This specularis indicatio, this information by beacons, was said to have been invented by Sinon in the time of the Trojan war; but Æschylus had a poetic right to attribute it to his hero. The man, after nine years passed in this sleepless post, had reason to complain of a task which had fixed him to the roof of Agamemnon like a dog; not that this was a debasing idea, that animal being the emblem of fidelity, vigilance, and sagacious discernment of friend from enemy, as the learned reader may find it accounted for in very good words by Plutarch in his Treatise on Isis and Osiris: they were therefore the usual night-guards of great houses; Alcinous in the Odyssey had them of gold and silver,

Χρύσειοι δ' ἑκάτερθε καὶ ἀργύρεοι κύνες ἦσαν
Δῶμα φυλασσόμενοι.

The signal of its ruin: these high hopes
My royal mistress, thinking on her lord (2),
Feeds in her heart. Meanwhile the dews of night
Fall on my couch, unvisited by dreams;
For fear, lest sleep should close my eyes, repels
The soft intruder. When my spirits prompt me
To raise the song, or hum the sullen notes
Preventing slumber, then I sigh, and wail
The state of this unhappy house, no more
Well-order'd as of old. But may my toils
Be happily reliev'd! Blaze, thou bright flame,
Herald of joy, blaze through the gloomy shades.—
And it does blaze.—Hail, thou auspicious flame,
That streaming through the night denouncest joy,
Welcom'd with many a festal dance in Argos!—
In the queen's ear I'll holla this, and rouse her
From her soft couch with speed (3), that she may teach
The royal dome to echo with the strains
Of choral warblings greeting this blest fire,
Bright sign that Troy is taken. Nor shall I
Forbear the prelude to the dance before her:
For by this watch, so prosperously concluded,
I to my masters shall assure good fortune.

(2) One is surprised and sorry to find the excellent Stanley interpreting ἀνδρόβουλον here by viro insidiantem, as if this Watchman had penetrated into the horrid design of Clytemnestra. He had indeed observed, that the house was not now well ordered as of old; and he gives some humorous hints of the indecent conduct of the queen; but further than this his penetration reached not. Had the great secret been thus early discovered, it would have at once removed that suspense and solicitude for the event, which the poet has the address to keep up throughout the play, in which we shall see cause to admire his art and judgement.

(3) It is generally agreed, that Troy was taken in the night; this supplied Euripides with the subject of a very pathetic ode in his Hecuba: thus Virgil,

Invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam.

Shall I then see my king return'd, once more
To grace this house? and shall this hand once more
Hang on his friendly hand?—I could unfold
A tale.—But, hush; my tongue is chain'd: these walls,
Could they but speak, would make discoveries.
There are who know this; and to them this hint
Were plain: to those, that know it not, mysterious.

CHORUS.

The tenth slow year rolls on, since great in arms
The noble sons of Atreus, each exalted
To majesty and empire, royal brothers,
Led hence a thousand ships, the Argive fleet,
Big with the fate of Priam and of Troy;
A warlike preparation; their bold breasts
Breathing heroic ardour to high deeds;
Like vultures, which, their unplumed offspring lost (4),
Whirl many' a rapid flight, for that their toil
To guard their young was vain: till some high pow'r,
For they are dear to Phœbus, dear to Pan,
And Jove, with pity hears their shrill-voic'd grief,
And sends, though late, the fury to avenge
Their plunder'd nests on the unpitying spoilers.
So now the pow'r of hospitable Jove (5)

(4) The religious turn, which the poet has given to this simile, adds a solemn grace to the beautiful imagery, the vulture being sacred to Apollo, as the god of augury, to Pan as the patron of hunters, and to Jupiter as the protector of kings.

(5) We receive the highest ideas of the civilized manners and social sense of the ancients, from their religious observation of the rights of hospitality; we have many instances of this in Homer, particularly in the interview of Glaucus and Diomede. Jupiter himself was the protector of these laws, hence his title of ξένιος: to these laws Ovid alludes,

Ausus es hospitii temeratis advena sacris
Legitimam nuptæ sollicitare fidem.

Arms against Paris, for th' oft-wedded dame(6),
The sons of Atreus, bent to plunge the hosts
Of Greece and Troy in all the toils, that sink
The body down, the firm knee bow'd in dust,
And the strong spear, ere conquest crowns their helms,
Shiver'd in battle. These are what they are,
And Fate directs th' event: nor the bent knee,
Libation pure, or supplicating tear,
Can sooth the stern rage of those merciless pow'rs
In whose cold shrine no hallow'd flame ascends(7).
But we, our age-enfeebled limbs unfit
For martial toils, inglorious here remain,
The staff supporting our weak steps, like children:
For as the infant years have not attain'd
The military vigour, wither'd age
Crawls through the streets like helpless infancy,
And passes as a day-dream.—But what tidings,
What circumstances of fair event hath reach'd
Thy royal ears, daughter of Tyndarus,
Inducing thee to send the victims round?
The shrines of all the gods, whose guardian cares
Watch o'er this state, be they enthron'd in heav'n,
Or rule beneath the earth, blaze with thy presents;
And from th' imperial dome a length'ned line
Of torches shoot their lustre to the skies.
O tell me what is fit for me to know,
And prudence suffers to be told: speak peace
To this anxiety, which one while swells
Presaging ill, and one while from the victims
Catches a gleam of hope, whose cheering ray

(6) Helena was said to have been carried off by Theseus, before she was wedded to Menelaus.

(7) The Fates and the Furies, at whose rites no fire was used.

Breaks through the gloom that darkens o'er my soul.

STROPHE.

It swells upon my soul; I feel the pow'r (8)
To hail th' auspicious hour,
When, their brave hosts marching in firm array,
The heroes led the way.
The fire of youth glows in each vein,
And heav'n-born confidence inspires the strain.
Pleas'd the omen to record,
That to Troy's ill-fated strand
Led each monarch, mighty lord,
Led the bold confederate band,
The strong spear quiv'ring in their vengeful hand,
Full in each royal chieftain's view,
A royal eagle whirls his flight;
In plumage one of dusky hue,
And one his dark wings edg'd with white;
Swift to th' imperial mansion take their way,
And in their armed talons bear,
Seiz'd in its flight, a pregnant hare,
And in those splendid seats enjoy their prey.

Sound high the strain, the swelling notes prolong,
Till conquest listens to the raptur'd song.

(8) P. Brumoy, complaining of the obscurity of this tragedy, says, Il y a tant de métaphores, de figures, et des tours extraordinaires, qu'on ne sçauroit se vanter de les avoir tous démêlés. And of this ode, L'on peut bien défier toute plume Françoise de rendre ce morceau, tant il est defiguré et entortillé. Discouraging this: for how shall the English grey-goose-quill hope to give the critical reader satisfaction, where the plume Françoise despairs? Essayons cependant.

The Chorus, seized with a sacred inspiration, records the omen which was given to the brother kings on their march from Argos. Two eagles, the one of dark plumage, the strongest and the swiftest of the kind, the other of a species somewhat inferior, seize a pregnant hare, and bear it in their talons to the palace of Agamemnon.

ANTISTROPHE.

The venerable seer, whose skill divine (9)
Knows what the Fates design,
On each bold chief, that for the battle burns,
His glowing eye-ball turns;
And thus in high prophetic strains
The rav'ning eagles and their prey explains:
" Priam's haughty town shall fall,
" Slow they roll, the destin'd hours,
" Fate and fury shake her wall,
" Vengeance wide the ruin pours,
" And conquest seizes all her treasur'd stores.
" Ah, may no storm from th' angry sky
" Burst dreadful o'er this martial train,
" Nor check their ardour, flaming high
" To pour the war o'er Troy's proud plain!
" Wrath kindles in the chaste Diana's breast:
" Gorg'd with the pregnant mother's blood,
" And, ere the birth, her hapless brood,
" Hell-hounds of Jove, she hates your horrid feast.

(9) The fate-fortelling Chalcas explains the omen, that the imperial eagles denote the royal brothers, and the capture of the hare, their success in taking Troy; but as the hare was pregnant, it was under the immediate protection of Diana, who, as goddess of the chase, was the guardian of the infant race of all animals that are feræ naturæ: this the prophet fears is an indication of the anger of that goddess.

This passage is very obscure, and certainly nothing elucidated by the annotator, who sends us to the sparrows at Aulis for its interpretation; whereas the precise words of the Chorus confine us to a single omen given to the kings when they were marching from the royal palace at Argos,

Μόρσιμ' ἀπ' ὀρνίθων
Ὀδίων οἴκοις βασιλείοις. v. 164. Æschyl.

nor will φιλομάζοις ὀρικάλοισι permit us to think of unfledged birds: leaving Pauw and his adversaries then to settle what he calls ineptius grammaticorum, we thankfully adopt the very beautiful image he has given us, and proceed.

" Sound high the strain, the swelling notes prolong,
" Till conquest listens to the raptur'd song.

EPODE.

" The virgin goddess of the chase,
" Fair from the spangled dew-drops that adorn
" The breathing flowrets of the morn,
" Protectress of the infant race
" Of all that haunt the tangled grove,
" Or o'er the rugged mountains rove,
" She, beauteous queen, commands me to declare
" What by the royal birds is shown,
" Signal of conquest, omen fair,
" But darken'd by her awful frown.
" God of the distant-wounding bow,
" Thee, Pæan, thee I call; hear us, and aid (10);
" Ah! may not the offended maid
" Give the sullen gales to blow,
" Adverse to this eager train,
" And bar th' unnavigable main;
" Nor other sacrifice demand,
" At whose barbaric rites no feast is spread;
" But discord rears her horrid head,
" And calls around her murd'rous band:
" Leagued with hate, and fraud, and fear,
" Nor king, nor husband, they revere;

(10 The prophet, impressed with the idea of the anger of Diana, invokes Apollo to appease his sister, that she might not raise any adverse winds to retard the expedition, nor demand any sacrifice of horrid and barbaric rites: by the first alluding to the contrary winds which afterwards detained the fleet at Aulis; by the latter, to the sacrifice of Iphigenia.—Thus far the Chorus has recorded the prophecy of Chalcas, and with as little obscurity as one has reason to expect in such oracular answers, except in the beginning of the epode, where the text is unhappily corrupted.

" Indignant o'er a daughter weep,
" And burn to stamp their vengeance deep?"
Prophetic thus the reverend Chalcas spoke,
Marking th' imperial eagles' whirling wings;
From his rapt lips the joyful presage broke,
Success and glory to th' embattled kings.

Sound high the strain, th' according notes prolong,
Till conquest listens to the raptur'd song.

STROPHE 1.

O thou (11), that sitt'st supreme above,
Whatever name thou deign'st to hear,
Unblam'd may I pronounce thee Jove!
Immers'd in deep and holy thought,
If rightly I conjecture aught,
Thy pow'r I must revere:
Else vainly tost the anxious mind
Nor truth, nor calm repose, can find.
Feeble and helpless to the light
The proudest of man's race arose,
Though now, exulting in his might,
Dauntless he rushes on his foes;

(11) The Chorus now reassumes its proper character, and begins this ode with a solemn address to Jupiter, illud, quicquid est, summum, if that name were agreeable to him; for the ancients in their invocations of the gods, were under a superstitious dread of offending them, should they speak to them by a name ungrateful to their ears, or omit the name most pleasing to them. Him the Chorus reveres, as in him alone their anxious thoughts could find repose. Whoever he may be, that without this pious reverence exults in his might, he enjoys but a short-lived glory.

He meets a greater, and he dies.

(The old Scholiast understands this of the Titans; a modern critic agrees with him, but at the same time clearly sees that Xerxes and Darius are adumbrated.) This is a general reflection.

Great as he is, in dust he lies;
He meets a greater, and he dies.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

He that, when conquest brightens round (12),
Swells the triumphal strain to Jove,
Shall ever with success be crown'd.
Yet often, when to wisdom's seat
Jove deigns to guide man's erring feet,
His virtues to improve;
He to affliction gives command
To form him with her chast'ning hand:
The memory of her rigid lore,
On the sad heart imprinted deep,
Attends him through day's active hour,
Nor in the night forsakes his sleep.
Instructed thus thy grace we own,
O thou, that sitt'st on Heav'n's high throne!

STROPHE 2.

When now in Aulis' rolling bay (13)
His course the refluent floods refus'd,
And sick'ning with inaction lay
In dead repose th' exhausted train,
Did the firm chief of chance complain?

(12) On the other hand, the man, who amidst his successes pays his grateful vows to Jupiter, shall have his prosperity continued to him. Though sometimes, when the god leads mortals to wisdom, he effects his purpose by afflictions; the memory of which makes a deep impression on the sufferer, and compels him to be wise: even this is acknowledged as the effect of divine grace. This is the address of the Chorus to Jupiter, sober, manly, rational, and a fine prelude to the afflictions of Agamemnon next to be mentioned.

(13) The anger of Diana now shows itself, and the Grecian fleet is detained by adverse winds at Aulis; the consequence of this is briefly, but finely described; but even under this mortifying calamity the hero shows no impious discontent, accuses no god nor man; but stands in a melancholy silence with his eyes fixed on an opposite island, and observing the refluent flood.

No prophet he accus'd;
His eyes towards Chalcis bent he stood,
And silent mark'd the surging flood.
Sullen the winds from Strymon sweep,
Mischance and famine in the blast,
Ceaseless torment the angry deep,
The cordage rend, the vessels waste,
With tedious and severe delay
Wear the fresh flow'r of Greece away.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

When, in Diana's name, the seer (14)
Pronounc'd the dreadful remedy
More than the stormy sea severe,
Each chieftain stood in grief profound,
And smote his sceptre on the ground:
Then with a rising sigh
The monarch, whilst the big tears roll,
Express'd the anguish of his soul:
" Dreadful the sentence: not t' obey,
" Vengeance and ruin close us round:
" Shall then the sire his daughter slay,
" In youth's fresh bloom with beauty crown'd?
" Shall on these hands her warm blood flow?
" Cruel alternative of wo!

(14) In the midst of this distress, the prophet declared, that the anger of the goddess would not be appeased, nor would the winds permit the fleet to sail out of the harbour, but by the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the beautiful daughter of Agamemnon: the anguish of his soul, and the conflicting passions of the father and king, are here pathetically described, till at length the king prevails:

Utcunque ferent ea facta nepotes,
Vincit amor patriæ, laudumque immensa cupido.

STROPHE 3.

" This royal fleet, this martial host,
" The cause of Greece, shall I betray,
" The monarch in the father lost?
" To calm these winds, to smooth this flood,
" Diana's wrath a virgin's blood (15)
" Demands: 'tis ours t' obey."
Bound in necessity's iron chain
Reluctant nature strives in vain:
Impure, unholy thoughts succeed,
And dark'ning o'er his bosom roll;
Whilst madness prompts the ruthless deed,
Tyrant of the misguided soul:
Stern on the fleet he rolls his eyes,
And dooms the hateful sacrifice.

ANTISTROPHE 3.

Arm'd in a woman's cause, around
Fierce for the war the princes rose;

(15) There is something horrid in the superstition of ancient paganism, which often impelled even the most religious persons to actions that were shocking to humanity, and at the same time left them exposed to infamy and punishment, as if they had been voluntarily guilty. It was in the Fates, that Œdipus should kill his father and marry his mother; by the very methods which he took to avoid the completion of this oracle, and those the wisest which human providence could suggest, he was entangled in the fatal net; yet the anger of the gods pursued him even to ruin, and the extermination of his family. Orestes was commanded by Apollo to kill his mother, with threats of the severest vengeance should he presume to disobey; but no sooner was the deed done, than he was pursued by the Furies, and haunted even to distraction. So here Agamemnon has this cruel alternative proposed to him, either to appease the anger of Diana, and purchase a favourable wind by the blood of his daughter, or to see this great armament of united Greece, her heroes, and her glory, unprofitably wasted at Aulis: yet even the Chorus here, though under the influence of the strongest religious impressions, instead of extolling the hero for suffering the patriot passions to prevail over private affection, censure the deed, though acknowledged to be necessary, as audacious, mad, and unholy. But we shall see that the poet knew what he was about.

No place affrighted pity found.
In vain the virgin's streaming tear,
Her cries in vain, her pleading pray'r,
Her agonizing woes.
Could the fond father hear unmov'd?
The Fates decreed: the king approv'd:
Then to th' attendants gave command
Decent her flowing robes to bind;
Prone on the altar with strong hand
To place her, like a spotless hind;
And check her sweet voice, that no sound
Unhallow'd might the rites confound.

EPODE.

Rent on the earth her maiden veil she throws(16),
That emulates the rose;
And on the sad attendants rolling
The trembling lustre of her dewy eyes,
Their grief-empassion'd souls controlling,
That ennobled, modest grace,
Which the mimic pencil tries
In the imag'd form to trace,
The breathing picture shows:
And as, amidst his festal pleasures,
Her father oft rejoic'd to hear
Her voice in soft mellifluous measures
Warble the sprightly-fancied air;
So now in act to speak the virgin stands:

(16) The behaviour of Iphigenia is described with inimitable beauty: there is an eloquence in her actions, in her eyes, in her attitude, beyond the power of words. As she had been admitted to her father's feasts, and accustomed to entertain him with her songs, she presumed on his fondness, and throwing off her maiden veil (as its colour signifies), stood in the act to speak to him; but hearing his voice commanding silence, she obeyed with meek submission. This is the painting of a great master.

But when, the third libation paid,
She heard her father's dread commands
Enjoining silence, she obey'd:
And for her country's good,
With patient, meek, submissive mind
To her hard fate resign'd,
Pour'd out the rich stream of her blood.

What since hath past I know not, nor relate (17);
But never did the prophet speak in vain,
Th' afflicted, anxious for his future fate,
Looks forward, and with hope relieves his pain.

But since th' inevitable ill will come,
Much knowledge to much misery is allied;
Why strive we then t' anticipate the doom,
Which happiness and wisdom wish to hide?

Yet let this careful, age-enfeebled band
Breathe from our inmost soul one ardent vow,
Now the sole guardians of this Apian land,
"May fair success with glory bind her brow!"

CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

With reverence, Clytemnestra, I approach
Thy greatness; honour due to her that fills
The royal seat, yet vacant of its lord.
If aught of glad import hath reach'd thy ear,

(17) The Chorus observes a judicious silence with regard to what ensued: we hope however again to introduce this unfortunate and amiable lady to the acquaintance of the English reader. The remaining part of the ode contains only a melancholy reflection introduced with great propriety, as a gloomy presage of the catastrophe; even the concluding prayer for the welfare of Greece has the same turn.

Or to fair hope the victim bleeds (18), I wish,
But with submission to thy will, to hear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The joy-importing Morn springs, as they say,
From Night, her mother. Thou shalt hear a joy
Beyond thy hopes to hear: The town of Priam
Is fallen beneath the conquering arms of Greece.

CHORUS.

What saidst thou? Passing credence fled thy word.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

In Troy Greece triumphs. Speak I clearly now?

CHORUS.

Joy steals upon me, and calls forth the tear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thy glist'ning eye bespeaks an honest heart.

CHORUS.

Does aught of certain proof confirm these tidings?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It does: Why not? unless the gods deceive us.

CHORUS.

Perchance the visions of persuasive dreams.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sport of the slumb'ring soul; they move not me.

CHORUS.

Hath then some winged rumour spread these transports?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As a raw girl's, thou hold'st my judgement cheap.

CHORUS.

How long hath ruin crush'd this haughty city?

(18) On hearing good tidings, even though the report was uncertain, it was usual to sacrifice to good hope, *εὐαγγελίοισιν ἐλπίσιν*.—STANLEY—and to send a share of the victims to their friends.—See p. 174. l. 20.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This night, that gave this infant morning birth.

CHORUS.

What speed could be the herald of this news?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The fire, that from the height of Ida sent
Its streaming light, as from th' announcing flame
Torch blaz'd to torch. First Ida to the steep
Of Lemnos; Athos' sacred height receiv'd
The mighty splendor; from the surging back
Of th' Hellespont the vig'rous blaze held on
Its smiling way, and like the orient sun
Illumes with golden-gleaming rays the head
Of rocky Macetas; nor lingers there,
Nor winks unheedful, but its warning flames
Darts to the streams of Euripus, and gives
Its glitt'ring signal to the guards that hold
Their high watch on Mesapius. These enkindle
The joy-denouncing fires, that spread the blaze
To where Erica hoar its shaggy brow
Waves rudely. Unimpair'd the active flame
Bounds o'er the level of Asopus, like
The jocund Moon, and on Cithæron's steep
Wakes a successive flame; the distant watch
Agnize its shine, and raise a brighter fire,
That o'er the lake Gorgopis streaming holds
Its rapid course, and on the mountainous heights
Of Ægiplanctus huge, swift-shooting spreads
The lengthen'd line of light. Thence onwards waves
Its fiery tresses, eager to ascend
The crags of Prone, frowning in their pride
O'er the Saronic gulf: it leaps, it mounts
The summit of Arachne, whose high head

Looks down on Argos: to this royal seat
Thence darts the light that from th' Idæan fire
Derives its birth. Rightly in order thus
Each to the next consigns the torch, and fills
The bright succession, whilst the first in speed
Vies with the last: the promis'd signal this
Giv'n by my lord t' announce the fall of Troy.

CHORUS.

Anon my grateful praise shall rise to Heav'n:
Now, lady, would I willingly attend
Through each glad circumstance the wondrous tale.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This day the conquering Greeks are lords of Troy.
Methinks I hear the various clamours rise
Discordant through the city. Pour thou oil
In the same vase and vinegar, in vain
Wouldst thou persuade th' unsocial streams to mix:
The captives' and the conqueror's voice distinct,
Marks of their different fortune, mayst thou hear:
Those rolling on the bodies of the slain,
Friends, husbands, brothers, fathers; the weak arms
Of children clasp'd around the bleeding limbs
Of hoary age, lament their fall, their necks
Bent to the yoke of slavery: eager these
From the fierce toils of war, who through the gloom
Of night rang'd wide, fly on the spoils, as chance,
Not order, leads them; in the Trojan houses,
Won by their spears, they walk at large, reliev'd
From the cold dews dropt from th' unshelter'd sky;
And at th' approach of eve, like those whose pow'r
Commands security, the easy night
Shall sleep unguarded. If with hallow'd rites

They venerate the gods that o'er the city (19),
With those that o'er the vanquish'd country rule,
And reverence their shrines, the conquering troops
Shall not be conquer'd. May no base desire,
No guilty wish urge them, enthrall'd to gain,
To break through sacred laws. Behoves them now,
With safety in their train, backward to plow
The refluent wave. Should they return expos'd
To th' anger of the gods, vengeance would wake
To seize its prey, might they perchance escape
Life's incidental ills. From me thou hearest
A woman's sentiment; and much I wish,
Their glories by no rude mischance depress'd,
To cull from many blessings the most precious.

CHORUS.

With manly sentiment thy wisdom, lady,
Speaks well. Confiding in thy suasive signs,
Prepare we to address the gods; our strains
Shall not without their meed of honour rise.

PROSODE.

Supreme of kings (20), Jove; and thou, friendly night,
That wide o'er heav'n's star-spangled plain

(19) It was observed in the preface to this tragedy, that the character of Clytemnestra is that of a high-spirited, close, determined, dangerous woman; this character now begins to unfold itself. She had with deep premeditation planned the murder of her husband; he was now returning; her soul of course must at this time be full of her horrid design, and all her thoughts intent upon the execution of it: we have in the remaining part of this speech a strong proof of this; she is dark, sententious, and even religious; so the Chorus understands her words, and so she intends they should; but the very expressions, by which she wishes to conceal, and does conceal her purpose from the Argive senators, by being ambiguous, and comprehending a double meaning, so far mark the working of her mind, as to give us a hint of what is revolving there.

(20) This ode, as the last, begins with a sublime and manly address to Jupiter, acknowledging his power, and the certainty of his judgements on the impious, though deferred for a season.

Holdest thy awful reign,
Thou, that with resistless might
O'er Troy's proud tow'rs, and destin'd state,
Hast thrown the secret net of fate,
In whose enormous sweep the young, the old,
Without distinction roll'd,
Are with unsparing fury dragg'd away
To slavery and wo a prey:
Thee, hospitable Jove, whose vengeful pow'r
These terrors o'er the foe has spread,
Thy bow long bent at Paris' head,
Whose arrows know their time to fly,
Not hurtling aimless in the sky,
Our pious strains adore.

STROPHE 1.

The hand of Jove will they not own (21);
And, as his marks they trace,
Confess he will'd, and it was done?
Who now of earth-born race
Shall dare contend that his high pow'r
Deigns not with eye severe to view
The wretch that tramples on his law?
Hence with this impious lore:
Learn that the sons accurs'd shall rue
The madly daring father's pride,
That furious drew th' unrighteous sword,
High in his house the rich spoils stor'd,
And the avenging gods defied.
But be it mine to draw

(21) These judgements had fallen in so conspicuous a manner on guilty Troy, that it was impossible not to see the immediate hand of the god, and to own that no might, no riches can protect the impious from his just vengeance.

From wisdom's fount, pure as it flows,
That calm of soul, which virtue only knows.
For vain the shield that wealth shall spread,
To guard the proud oppressor's head,
Who dares the rites of Justice to confound,
And spurn her altars to the ground.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

But suasive is the voice of vice (22),
That spreads th' insidious snare:
She, not conceal'd, through her disguise
Emits a livid glare.
Her vot'ry, like adult'rate brass
Unfaithful to its use, unsound,
Proves the dark baseness of his soul;
Fond as a boy to chase
The winged bird light-flitting round,
And bent on his pernicious play
Draws desolation on his state.
His vows no god regards, when Fate
In vengeance sweeps the wretch away.
With base intent and foul,
Each hospitable law defied,
From Sparta's king thus Paris stole his bride.

(22) Yet vice has its assuasive charms; but the remedy is not entirely concealed, as the mischief glares through her disguise; and as adulterate brass is discovered by a proper trial, so is it with the wicked, who pursues his wanton sports to the destruction of his country; considering the subject, the allusion to a boy pursuing a bird has a singular propriety and beauty: here the great moral recurs again, that vice shall not be unpunished; and the whole is applied to Paris, who, in violation of the sacred rights of hospitality, bore away the wife of Menelaus. There are few passages in Æschylus more obscure than this antistrophe; the translator has applied all his attention to it, but presumes not to say how far he has succeeded. The same critic, who before sent us to Aulis for a sparrow's nest, has here discovered the firebrand of Hecuba, the prophecy of Cassandra, and the improvident care of the mother to preserve her son: but this surely is all a dream.

To Greece she left the shield, the spear,
The naval armament of war;
And, bold in ill, to Troy's devoted shore
Destruction for her dowry bore.

STROPHE 2.

When through the gates her easy way (23)
She took, his pensive breast
Each prophet smote in deep dismay,
And thus his grief exprest:
" What woes this royal mansion threat,
" This mansion, and its mighty lord?
" Where now the chaste connubial bed?
" The traces of her feet,
" By love to her blest consort led,
" Where now? Ah! silent, see, she stands;
" Each glowing tint, each radiant grace,
" That charm th' enraptur'd eye, we trace;
" And still the blooming form commands,
" Still honour'd, still ador'd,
" Though careless of her former loves
" Far o'er the rolling sea the wanton roves:
" The husband, with a bursting sigh,
" Turns from the pictur'd fair his eye;
" Whilst love, by absence fed, without control
" Tumultuous rushes on his soul.

(23) We are now prepared for an account of the departure of Helena with Paris: the dismay of the Spartan seers, the affliction of the husband fixed in silent grief on the picture of his inconstant wife, then turning from it with a bursting sigh, and his dreams, that present her to his imagination in all her attractive charms, then vanish and leave him in despair, are finely imaged; so the grief, which arose first in the house of Menelaus, and thence spread its gloom over all Greece, is well conceived, and tends to carry on the poet's general design, which was to represent the dreadful consequences of this fatal war.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

" Oft as short slumbers close his eyes,
" His sad soul sooth'd to rest,
" The dream-created visions rise,
" With all her charms imprest:
" But vain th' ideal scene, that smiles
" With rapt'rous love and warm delight;
" Vain his fond hopes: his eager arms
" The fleeting form beguiles,
" On sleep's quick pinions passing light."
Such griefs, and more severe than these,
Their sad gloom o'er the palace spread;
Thence stretch their melancholy shade,
And darken o'er the realms of Greece.
Struck with no false alarms
Each house its home-felt sorrow knows (24),
Each bleeding heart is pierc'd with keenest woes;

(24) Paris had been guilty of the most atrocious act of injustice to Menelaus; all Greece had united to revenge the affront, and had chosen Agamemnon as the commander in chief of this mighty armament; he had carried on a great and dangerous war for ten years; was brave, wise, and just, had subverted the empire of Priam, and raised the military fame of his country to the highest glory; was now returning crowned with conquest, and enriched with spoils, the most illustrious of mortal men; might we not then expect that his faithful senators, who loved and honoured him, should have celebrated the victories of their king, and welcomed his return to Argos with pæans of joy? Instead of this, they dwell on the miseries of the war, the unhappiness of families which, instead of their lords, had received back only their arms stained with their blood, or urns containing their ashes, the murmurs of the people, and the severe retaliation demanded for blood, even though shed in a just war: in short, all their ideas, and even their moral reflections, are gloomy and of ill presage. But the great poet knew what he was about: the character of the Chorus was sacred, their claim of inspiration had rendered it prophetic, they were not therefore to be dazzled with the vain splendor of triumphs immediately before them; but their minds were carried forward to future events, and there every presage was dark and melancholy; and by this judicious conduct we are further prepared for the catastrophe.

When for the hero, sent to share
The glories of the crimson war,
Nought, save his arms stain'd with their master's gore,
And his cold ashes reach the shore.

STROPHE 3.

Thus in the dire exchange of war
Does Mars the balance hold;
Helms are the scales, the beam a spear,
And blood is weigh'd for gold.
Thus, for the warrior, to his friends
His sad remains, a poor return,
Sav'd from the sullen fire that rose
On Troy's curs'd shore, he sends,
Plac'd decent in the mournful urn.
With many' a tear their dead they weep,
Their names with many' a praise resound;
One for his skill in arms renown'd;
One, that amidst the slaughter'd heap
Of fierce-conflicting foes
Glorious in beauty's cause he fell:
Yet 'gainst th' avenging chiefs their murmurs swell
In silence. Some in youth's fresh bloom
Beneath Troy's tow'rs possess a tomb;
Their bodies buried on the distant strand,
Seizing in death the hostile land.

ANTISTROPHE 3.

How dreadful, when the people raise
Loud murmurs mix'd with hate!
Yet this the tribute greatness pays
For its exalted state.
Ev'n now some dark and horrid deed
By my presaging soul is fear'd;

For never with unheedful eyes,
When slaughter'd thousands bleed,
Did the just pow'rs of Heav'n regard
The carnage of th' ensanguin'd plain.
The ruthless and oppressive pow'r
May triumph for its little hour;
Full soon with all their vengeful train
The sullen Furies rise,
Break his fell force, and whirl him down
Through life's dark paths, unpitied, and unknown.
And dangerous is the pride of fame,
Like the red lightnings dazzling flame.
Nor envied wealth, nor conquest let me gain,
Nor drag the conqueror's hateful chain.

EPODE.

But from these fires far streaming through the night
Fame through the town her progress takes,
And rapt'rous joy awakes;
If with truth's auspicious light
They shine, who knows? Her sacred reign
Nor fraud, nor falsehood, dares profane.
But who, in Wisdom's school so lightly taught,
Suffers his ardent thought
From these informing flames to catch the fire,
Full soon perchance in grief t' expire?
Yet when a woman holds the sovereign sway,
Obsequious wisdom learns to bow,
And hails the joy it does not know;
Though, as the glitt'ring visions roll
Before her easy, credulous soul,
Their glories fade away.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whether these fires, that with successive signals

Blaze through the night, be true, or like a dream
Play with a sweet delusion on the soul,
Soon shall we know. A herald from the shore
I see; branches of olive shade his brows.
That cloud of dust, rais'd by his speed, assures me
That neither speechless, nor enkindling flames
Along the mountains, will he signify
His message; but his tongue shall greet our ears
With words of joy: far from my soul the thought
Of other, than confirm these fav'ring signals.

CHORUS.

May he, that to this state shall form a wish
Of other aim, on his own head receive it.

CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS, HERALD.

HERALD.

Hail, thou paternal soil of Argive earth!
In the fair light of the tenth year to thee
Return'd, from the sad wreck of many hopes
This one I save; sav'd from despair ev'n this;
For never thought I in this honour'd earth
To share in death the portion of a tomb.
Hail then, lov'd earth; hail, thou bright sun; and thou,
Great guardian of my country, supreme Jove;
Thou, Pythian king, thy shafts no longer wing'd
For our destruction (25); on Scamander's banks

(25) This alludes to the pestilence in the Grecian camp, by Homer ascribed to Apollo as a punishment for the affront offered to his priest Chryses:

Thus Chryses pray'd: the fav'ring power attends,
And from Olympus' lofty tops descends.
Bent was his bow the Grecian hearts to wound;
Fierce as he mov'd, his silver shafts resound.
Breathing revenge, a sudden night he spread,
And gloomy darkness roll'd around his head.
The fleet in view, he twang'd his deadly bow,
And hissing fly the feather'd fates below, &c.—POPE.

Enough we mourn'd thy wrath; propitious now
Come, king Apollo, our defence. And all
Ye gods, that o'er the works of war preside,
I now invoke; thee, Mercury (26), my avenger,
Rever'd by heralds, that from thee derive
Their high employ; you heroes (27), to the war
That sent us, friendly now receive our troops,
The relics of the spear. Imperial walls,
Mansion of kings, ye seats rever'd; ye gods,
That to the golden sun before these gates
Present your honour'd forms; if e'er of old
Those eyes with favour have beheld the king,
Receive him now, after this length of time,
With glory; for he comes, and with him brings
To you, and all, a light that cheers this gloom:
Then greet him well; such honour is his meed.
The mighty king, that with the mace of Jove
Th' avenger, wherewith he subdues the earth,
Hath levell'd with the dust the tow'rs of Troy;
Their altars are o'erturn'd, their sacred shrines,
And all the race destroy'd. This iron yoke
Fix'd on the neck of Troy, victorious comes
The great Atrides, of all mortal men
Worthy of highest honours. Paris now,

(26) Mercury, as the messenger of the gods, was esteemed the patron of heralds, whose character therefore was always held sacred.

(27) The Grecians, in their solemn invocations of the gods, paid this reverence to the names of their heroes, supposing them still to be the protectors of their country. Thus Xenophon represents Cyrus, when marching into the territories of the enemy, before he passed the line of division, to have sacrificed to Jupiter, and the other gods, and, at the same time, to have invoked the heroes, the dwellers and guardians of Media; and after he had passed, to have again sacrificed to the gods, and propitiated the heroes guardians of Assyria.

XEN. CYR.

And the perfidious state, shall boast no more
His proud deeds unreveng'd; stript of his spoils,
The debt of justice for his thefts, his rapines,
Paid amply, o'er his father's house he spreads
With twofold loss the wide-involving ruin (28).

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Joy to thee, herald of the Argive host (29).

(28) He not only lost Helena, whom he had carried away, and the treasures brought with her, but had involved his country in ruin.

(29) Mr. Heath attributes to the Chorus the part here assigned to Clytemnestra. He thinks it unbecoming the dignity of the queen, and that the herald answers too familiarly: this mistake led him into many others. The herald's message was directly to the queen; and as he bore a sacred character, her dignity did not suffer by the conference; neither is there any thing of disrespectful familiarity on his part: ancient manners permitted not the Chorus to interrupt the queen. The ninth line of p. 197 is an evasive answer: this artful woman wished to appear to the herald, and by him to be represented, as having suffered much during her husband's absence; being asked, By whom? She replies with an affected caution, that silence had been her best remedy. What seems to have misled this learned critic, was his opinion that the Chorus hinted at the infamous commerce between Clytemnestra and Ægistheus; but the words on which he first founds his opinion, v. 555 of the original, have a very different meaning: the herald says, You desire to see those, who have as great a desire to see this country; she answers,

Such, that I oft have breath'd the secret sigh.

Mr. Heath derives another proof from the word κλύοντας, v. 589. which being masculine and plural, shows that the Herald had been addressing not Clytemnestra, but the Chorus: it rather shows, that this part of his discourse had been addressed both to Clytemnestra and the Chorus; had he spoke to the Chorus only, he would have used the singular number, as he does twice afterwards, when the queen had left them,

Ἐκύρσας, ὥστε τοξότης ἄκρος, σκοπῶ.—v. 637.
Τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας, ἴσθι τ'αληθῆ κλύων.—v. 689.

Nor is his critique on νικώμενος, translated "I am convinced," better founded; for this is a modest apology for their distrust of Clytemnestra's news, expressed in the last epode; to which she replies sarcastically, p. 199. l. 12. Mr. Heath finishes, by interpreting the 14th and 15th lines of p. 200, as if the Chorus insinuated that Clytemnestra had spoke with artful dissimulation what she wished the herald should relate to the king; and thereby hinted at her infidelity: but the words of the original are clear and express, and incapable of admitting any

HERALD.

For joy like this, death were a cheap exchange.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Strong thy affection to thy native soil.

HERALD.

So strong, the tear of joy starts from my eye.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What, hath this sweet infection reach'd ev'n you?

HERALD.

Beyond the power of language have I felt it.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The fond desire of those, whose equal love—

HERALD.

This of the army sayst thou, whose warm love
Streams to this land? Is this thy fond desire?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Such that I oft have breath'd the secret sigh.

HERALD.

Whence did the army cause this anxious sadness?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Silence I long have held a healing balm.

HERALD.

The princes absent, hadst thou whom to fear?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

To use thy words, death were a wish'd exchange.

HERALD.

Well is the conflict ended. In the tide
Of so long time, if midst the easy flow
Of wish'd events some tyrannous blast assail us,

other sense than what the translation presents. Indeed nothing could be more unhappily conceived than the opinion of these intimations from the Chorus, as it is repugnant to the whole plan and conduct of the play.

What marvel? Who, save the blest gods, can claim
Through life's whole course an unmix'd happiness?
Should I relate our toils, our wretched plight
Wedg'd in our narrow ill-provided cabins,
Each irksome hour was loaded with fatigues.
Yet these were slight assays to those worse hardships
We suffer'd on the shore: our lodging near
The walls of the enemy, the dews of heav'n
Fell on us from above, the damps beneath
From the moist marsh annoy'd us, shrouded ill
In shaggy cov'rings (30). Or should one relate
The winter's keen blasts, which from Ida's snows
Breathe frore, that, pierc'd through all their plumes, the birds
Shiver and die; or th' extreme heat that scalds,
When in his mid-day caves the sea reclines,
And not a breeze disturbs his calm repose.
But why lament these sufferings? They are past;
Past to the dead indeed; they lie, no more
Anxious to rise. What then avails to count
Those, whom the wasteful war hath swept away,
And with their loss afflict the living? Rather
Bid we farewell to misery: in our scale,
Who haply of the Grecian host remain,
The good preponderates, and in counterpoise
Our loss is light; and, after all our toils
By sea and land, before yon golden sun
It is our glorious privilege to boast,

(30) If the reader is not satisfied with Pauw's interpretation of this passage, nor with the translator's, Mr. Heath is at hand, who renders it thus, "The "dews wet us, the certain destruction of our garments, making our hair like the "shag of wild beasts." One would imagine that this learned person had Nebuchadnezzar in his thoughts, but that the hairs of the Assyrian monarch were grown like eagles' feathers. If by ἔνθηρον τρίχα we understand the shaggy coverings of the tents, we shall find it a good military idea.

" At length from vanquish'd Troy our warlike troops
" Have to the gods of Greece brought home these spoils,
" And in their temples, to record our conquests,
" Fix'd these proud trophies." Those, that hear this boast,
It well becomes to gratulate the state,
And the brave chiefs; revering Jove's high pow'r
That grac'd our conquering arms. Thou hast my message.

CHORUS.

Thy words convince me; all my doubts are vanish'd:
But scrupulous inquiry grows with age.
On Clytemnestra and her house this charge,
Blessing ev'n me with the rich joy, devolves.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Long since my voice rais'd high each note of joy,
When through the night the streaming blaze first came,
And told us Troy was taken: not unblam'd
That, as a woman lightly credulous,
I let a mountain fire transport my soul
With the fond hope that Ilion's haughty tow'rs
Were humbled in the dust. At this rebuke
Though somewhat shaken, yet I sacrific'd;
And, as weak women wont, one voice of joy
Awoke another, till the city rang
Through all its streets; and at the hallow'd shrines
Each rais'd the pious strains of gratitude,
And fann'd the altar's incense-breathing flame.
But it is needless to detain thee longer,
Soon from the king's own lips shall I learn all.
How best I may receive my honour'd lord,
And grace his wish'd return, now claims my speed.
Can heav'n's fair beam show a fond wife a sight
More grateful than her husband from his wars
Return'd with glory, when she opes the gate,

And springs to welcome him? Tell my lord this,
That he may hasten his desired return:
And tell him he will find his faithful wife,
Such as he left her, a domestic creature
To him all fondness, to his enemies
Irreconcileable; and tell him too
That ten long years have not effac'd the seal
Of Constancy; that never knew I pleasure
In the blamed converse of another man,
More than the virgin metal in the mines (31)
Knows an adulterate and debasing mixture.

HERALD.

This high boast, lady, sanctified by truth,
Is not unseemly in thy princely rank.

HERALD, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

This, for thy information, hath she spoken
With dignity and truth. Now tell me, herald,
Of Sparta's king wish I to question thee,
The pride of Greece: returns he safe with you?

HERALD.

Never can I esteem a falsehood honest,
Though my friends long enjoy the sweet delusion.

CHORUS.

What then if thou relate an honest truth?

(31) Of this passage Pauw honestly says, aliquid subest quod ego non intelligo. Mr. Heath disapproves the allusion, though he thinks it a proverbial expression, the grace of which is lost upon our ignorance, and says, quod nos non videmus alius forsan olim videbit. In the mean time, the translator had only one part to take, which was to supply what he thought the expression wanted to render it intelligible; a part, which all the interpreters of Æschylus must take, reduits souvent à deviner, on les voit hesiter, et chercher à rendre le sens quand ils ne peuvent se former une idée exacte des mots.

From this distinction the conjecture's easy.

HERALD.

Him from the Grecian fleet our eyes have lost,
The hero and his ship. This is the truth.

CHORUS.

Chanc'd this, when in your sight he weigh'd from Troy;
Or in a storm, that rent him from the fleet?

HERALD.

Rightly is thy conjecture aim'd, in brief
Touching the long recital of our loss.

CHORUS.

How deem'd the other mariners of this;
That the ship perish'd, or rode out the storm?

HERALD.

Who, save yon sun, the regent of the earth,
Can give a clear and certain information?

CHORUS.

How saidst thou then a storm, not without loss,
Wing'd with Heaven's fury, toss'd the shatter'd fleet.

HERALD.

It is not meet, with inauspicious tongue (32)
Spreading ill tidings, to profane a day
Sacred to festal joy: the gods require
Their pure rites undisturbed. When with a brow
Witness of wo, the messenger relates
Unwelcome news, defeats, and slaughter'd armies,
The wound with general grief affects the state;
And with particular and private sorrow

(32) Ancient superstition required that the festal days, instituted to the honour of the gods, for any success, should not be contaminated with any inauspicious word, much less with the relation of any unfortunate event; Æschylus here assigns the reason: hence the εὐφημεῖν of the Greeks, and the favere linguis of the Latins.—STANLEY.

Full many' a house, for many that have fall'n
Victims to Mars, who to his bloody car
Delights to yoke his terrors, sword and spear.
A pæan to the Furies would become
The bearer of such pond'rous heap of ills.
My tidings are of conquest and success
Diffusing joy: with these glad sounds how mix
Distress, and speak of storms, and angry gods?—
The pow'rs, before most hostile, now conspir'd,
Fire and the sea, in ruin reconcil'd:
And in a night of tempest wild from Thrace
In all their fury rush'd the howling winds;
Toss'd by the forceful blasts ship against ship
In hideous conflict dash'd, or disappear'd,
Driv'n at the boist'rous whirlwind's dreadful will,
But when the sun's fair light return'd, we see
Bodies of Grecians, and the wreck of ships
Float on the chaf'd foam of th' Ægæan sea.
Us and our ship some god, the power of man
Were all too weak, holding the helm preserv'd
Unhurt, or interceding for our safety;
And Fortune, the deliverer, steer'd our course
To shun the waves, that near the harbour's mouth
Boil high, or break upon the rocky shore.
Escap'd th' ingulfing sea, yet scarce secure
Of our escape, through the fair day we view
With sighs the recent sufferings of the host,
Cov'ring the sea with wrecks. If any breathe
This vital air, they deem us lost (33), as we

(33) Pauw censures the poet here as inconsistent, the Herald having before declared it improper to profane a day sacred to festal joy with ill tidings: Mr. Heath defends him, by saying the tidings are rather of good than of ill: but this is directly contrary to the herald's words, who speaks of tempests,

Think the same ruin theirs. Fair fall th' event!
But first and chief expect the Spartan king
T' arrive; if yet one ray of yon bright sun
Beholds him living, through the care of Jove,
Who wills not to destroy that royal race,
Well may we hope to joy in his return.
Having heard this, know thou hast heard the truth.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Is there to names a charm profound (34)
Expressive of their fates assign'd,
Mysterious potency of sound,
And truth in wondrous accord join'd?

wrecks, bodies floating on the waves, and the anger of the gods, as ill; and such to common understandings they must appear: indeed he seems apprehensive of this, yet thinks them very proper, as these unfortunate circumstances give a presage of the impending death of Agamemnon; at the same time they give it an air of probability, by rendering the king more obnoxious to the treacheries of Clytemnestra, as being returned with one single ship, without his friends and the army. Thus Mr. Heath; but it appears by the barbarous boasts of Clytemnestra, after she had perpetrated the horrid deed, that she had planned it in such a manner, at such a time, and in such a place, that the execution of it could not be prevented. The poet had a deeper design: though the dramatic unities had not their name in his time, yet they owe their existence to him, and he was as sensible, as any of his critics can be, of the impropriety of making Agamemnon appear at Argos the day after Troy was taken; yet his plan required this, and it is so finely executed, that he must be a critic minorum gentium who objects to it. The whole narration of the herald is calculated to soften this impropriety; a tempest separates the royal ship from the fleet, some god preserves it, and Fortune, the deliverer, guides it into the harbour; every thing is as rapid and impetuous as the genius of Æschylus, and the expression is so carefully guarded, that no hint is given of the vessel's being at sea more than one night: there are some subsequent expressions of the same tendency.

(34) The general design of this beautiful ode is so clear, that it wants no elucidation; the sober and religious moral, that breathes through the richest description and most vivid colouring, gives it the highest grace and the utmost perfection to which poetry can aspire.

Why else this fatal name,
That Helen and destruction are the same (35)?
Affianc'd in contention, led,
The spear her dowry, to the bridal bed;
With desolation in her train,
Fatal to martial hosts, to rampir'd towers,
From the rich fragrance of her gorgeous bowers,
Descending to the main,
She hastes to spread her flying sails,
And calls the earth-born zephyr's gales.
Whilst heroes, breathing vengeance, snatch their shields,
And trace her light oars o'er the pathless waves,
To the thick shades fresh waving o'er those fields,
Which Simois with his silver windings laves.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

To Troy the shining mischief came;
Before her, young-ey'd Pleasures play;
But in the rear with steadfast aim
Grim visag'd Vengeance marks his prey,
Waiting the dreadful hour
The terrors of offended Heav'n to pour
On those that dar'd, an impious train,
The rights of hospitable Jove profane;
Nor rever'd that sacred song,

(35) This is one of those passages where un tour vaut une pensée, et en est veritablement une: this grace, such as it is, vanishes the moment you attempt to transfuse it into another language.

Helena, in allusion to her name, is here called Helenas, Helandros, Heleptolis, the destroyer of ships, the destroyer of men, the destroyer of cities: a translator in such a case can only catch the general idea, if he retains the particular one, the fallen star becomes only a cold jelly: happily he had here an opportunity of availing himself of the general superstition of the ancients with regard to names; the philosophy of which opinion no Pythagorean nor Stoic, though both schools devoutly taught it, explained with better argument than the father of Tristram Shandy.

Whose melting strains the bride's approach declare,
As Hymen wakes the rapture-breathing air.
Far other notes belong,
The voice of mirth now heard no more,
To Priam's state; its ruins o'er
Wailing instead, distress, and loud lament;
Long sorrows sprung from that unholy bed,
And many' a curse in heart-felt anguish sent
On its wo-wedded Paris' hated head.

STROPHE 2.

The woodman, from his thirsty lair,
Reft of his dam, a lion bore;
Foster'd his future foe with care
To mischiefs he must soon deplore:
Gentle and tame, whilst young,
Harmless he frisk'd the fondling babes among;
Oft in the father's bosom lay,
Oft lick'd his feeding hand in fawning play;
Till, conscious of his firmer age,
His lion-race the lordly savage shows;
No more his youth-protecting cottage knows,
But with insatiate rage
Flies on the flocks, a baleful guest,
And riots in th' unbidden feast:
Whilst through his mangled folds the hapless swain
With horror sees th' unbounded carnage spread;
And learns too late that from th' infernal reign
A priest of Ate in his house was bred.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

To Ilion's tow'rs in wanton state
With speed she wings her easy way;
Soft gales obedient round her wait,
And pant on the delighted sea.

Attendant on her side
The richest ornaments of splendid pride:
The darts, whose golden points inspire,
Shot from her eyes the flames of soft desire;
The youthful bloom of rosy love,
That fills with ecstasy the willing soul;
With duteous zeal obey her sweet control.
But, such the doom of Jove,
Vindictive round her nuptial bed,
With threat'ning mien and footstep dread,
Rushes, to Priam and his state severe,
To rend the bleeding heart his stern delight,
And from the bridal eye to force the tear,
Erinnys, rising from the realms of night.

EPODE.

From ev'ry mouth we oft have heard
This saying, for its age rever'd;
" With joy we see our offspring rise,
" And happy, who not childless dies:
" But fortune, when her flow'rets blow,
" Oft bears the bitter fruit of wo."
Though these saws are as truths allow'd,
Thus I dare differ from the crowd,
" One base deed, with prolific pow'r,
" Like its curs'd stock engenders more:
" But to the just, with blooming grace
" Still flourishes, a beauteous race."

The old Injustice joys to breed
Her young, instinct with villanous deed;
The young her destin'd hour will find
To rush in mischief on mankind:

She too in Ate's murky cell,
Brings forth the hideous child of hell,
A burden to th' offended sky,
The power of bold impiety.

But Justice bids her ray divine
Ev'n on the low-roof'd cottage shine;
And beams her glories on the life,
That knows not fraud, nor ruffian strife.
The gorgeous glare of gold, obtain'd
By foul polluted hands, disdain'd
She leaves, and with averted eyes
To humbler, holier mansions flies;
And looking through the times to come
Assigns each deed its righteous doom.

CHORUS, AGAMEMNON.

CHORUS.

My royal lord, by whose victorious hand
The towers of Troy are fall'n, illustrious son
Of Atreus, with what words, what reverence
Shall I address thee, not t' o'erleap the bounds
Of modest duty, nor to sink beneath
An honourable welcome? Some there are,
That form themselves to seem, more than to be,
Transgressing honesty: to him that feels
Misfortune's rugged hand, full many' a tongue
Shall drop condolence, though th' unfeeling heart
Knows not the touch of sorrow; these again
In fortune's summer gale, with the like art,
Shall dress in forced smiles th' unwilling face:
But him the penetrating eye soon marks,
That in the seemly garb of honest zeal

Attempts to clothe his meager blandishments.
When first in Helen's cause my royal lord
Levied his host, let me not hide the truth,
Notes, other than of music, echoed wide
In loud complaints from such as deem'd him rash,
And void of reason, by constraint to plant
In breasts averse the martial soul, that glows
Despising death. But now their eager zeal
Streams friendly to those chiefs, whose prosp'rous valour
Is crown'd with conquest. Soon then shalt thou learn,
As each supports the state, or strives to rend it
With faction, who reveres thy dignity.

AGAMEMNON.

To Argos first, and to my country gods (36),
I bow with reverence, by whose holy guidance
On Troy's proud towers I pour'd their righteous vengeance,
And now revisit safe my native soil.
No loud-tongued pleader heard, they judg'd the cause,
And in the bloody urn (37), without one vote
Dissentient, cast the lots that fix'd the fate
Of Ilion and its sons: the other vase
Left empty, save of widow'd hope. The smoke,
Rolling in dusky wreaths, shows that the town

(36) Nothing shows the good sense and fine taste of the Athenians more, than their regard to religious sentiments, even in their public spectacles. Tragedy was not yet allowed to lose sight of reverence to the gods, the love of liberty, and affection to their country, principles the most necessary to be inculcated on the people. Agamemnon could not return the gratulations of his faithful senators, till he had addressed his paternal land, and its gods, who had led him to this war, and brought him back in safety. Such sentiments would reflect honour on more enlightened ages.

(37) The English reader will find the whole process of the ancient courts of judicature, the loud-tongued pleaders, and the urns or vases of acquittal or condemnation, in the Furies: the vase, into which the shells of condemnation are put, is here finely called "the bloody urn, *αἱματηρὸν τεῦχος*."

Is fall'n; the fiery storm yet lives, and high
The dying ashes toss rich clouds of wealth
Consum'd. For this behoves us to the gods
Render our grateful thanks, and that they spread
The net of fate sweeping with angry ruin.
In beauty's cause the Argive monster rear'd (38)
Its bulk enormous, to th' affrighted town
Portending devastation; in its womb
Hiding embattled hosts, rush'd furious forth,
About the setting of the Pleiades,
And, as a lion rav'ning for its prey,
Ramp'd o'er their walls, and lapp'd the blood of kings.
This to the gods address'd, I turn me now
Attentive to thy caution: I approve
Thy just remark, and with my voice confirm it.
Few have the fortitude of soul to honour
A friend's success, without a touch of envy;
For that malignant passion to the heart
Cleaves close, and with a double burden loads
The man infected with it: first he feels

(38) Virgil knew how to make a fine use of this noble imagery,

Scandit fatalis machina muros
Fœta armis.—
Illa subit, mediæque minans illabitur urbi.—
quater ipso in limite portæ
Substitit, atque utero sonitum quater arma dedere.
Instamus tamen immemores, cæcique furore,
Et monstrum infelix sacratâ sistimus arce.

We have nothing in our language more greatly conceived, or more finely expressed, than the first part of the Ode to Fear by Mr. Collins; it is in the genuine spirit of Æschylus; the last line is manifestly taken from hence,

Αδην ἕλει ξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ.
On whom that ravening brood of fate,
Who lap the blood of sorrow, wait.

In all their weight his own calamities,
Then sighs to see the happiness of others.
This of my own experience have I learn'd;
And this I know, that many, who in public
Have borne the semblance of my firmest friends,
Are but the flatt'ring image of a shadow
Reflected from a mirror: save Ulysses,
Alone, who, though averse to join our arms
Yok'd in his martial harness from my side
Swerv'd not; living or dead be this his praise.
But what concerns our kingdom and the gods,
Holding a general council of the state,
We will consult; that what is well may keep
Its goodness permanent, and what requires
Our healing hand, with mild severity
May be corrected. But my royal roof
Now will I visit, and before its hearths
Offer libations to the gods, who sent me
To this far distant war, and led me back.
Firm stands the victory that attends our arms.

CLYTEMNESTRA, AGAMEMNON, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Friends, fellow-citizens, whose counsels guide (39)

(39) According to the simplicity of ancient manners, Clytemnestra should have waited to receive her husband in the house; but her affected fondness led her to disregard decorum. Nothing can be conceived more artful than her speech; but that very art shows, that her heart had little share in it: her pretended sufferings during his absence are touched with great delicacy and tenderness; but had they been real, she would not have stopped him here with the querulous recital: the joy for his return, had she felt that joy, would have broke out first; this is deferred to the latter part of her address; there indeed she has amassed every image expressive of welcome; but her solicitude to assemble these leads her beyond nature, which expresses her strongest passions in broken sentences, and with a nervous brevity, not with the cold formality of a set harangue. Her last

The state of Argos, in your reverend presence
A wife's fond love I blush not to disclose:
Thus habit softens dread. From my full heart
Will I recount my melancholy life
Through the long stay of my lov'd lord at Troy:
For a weak woman, in her husband's absence,
Pensive to sit and lonely in her house,
'Tis dismal, list'ning to each frightful tale:
First one alarms her, then another comes
Charg'd with worse tidings. Had my poor lord here
Suffer'd as many wounds as common fame
Reported, like a net he had been pierc'd:
Had he been slain oft as the loud-tongued rumour
Was nois'd abroad, this triple-form'd Geryon(40),
A second of the name, whilst yet alive,
For of the dead I speak not, well might boast
To have receiv'd his triple mail, to die
In each form singly. Such reports oppress'd me,
Till life became distasteful, and my hands
Were prompted oft to deeds of desperation.
Nor is thy son Orestes, the dear tie
That binds us each to th' other, present here

words are another instance of the double sense which expresses reverence to her husband, but intends the bloody design with which her soul was agitated.

(40) Geryon was a king of Spain killed by Hercules, fabled to have three bodies, because he had three armies commanded by his three sons. Clytemnestra compares her husband to this giant, and says, that if he had been slain as often as was reported, this second triple Geryon (meaning Agamemnon under that name, for it were ominous to speak of the dead) might well boast to have received his triple vest, meaning his three bodies, and to have died once in each form. Mr. Heath might never have heard that Geryon, though he had three bodies, died more than once; nor does Pauw say it; but this does not hinder Clytemnestra from making the supposition, and nothing more is intended; the words of Æschylus are express:

Ἅπαξ ἑκάστῳ καθανὼν μορφώματι.

To aid me, as he ought: nay, marvel not,
The friendly Strophius with a right strong arm
Protects him in Phocæa; whilst his care
Saw danger threat me in a double form,
The loss of thee at Troy, the anarchy
That might ensue, should madness drive the people
To deeds of violence, as men are prompt
Insultingly to trample on the fall'n:
Such care dwells not with fraud. At thy return
The gushing fountains of my tears are dried,
Save that my eyes are weak with midnight watchings,
Straining, through tears, if haply they might see
Thy signal fires, that claim'd my fix'd attention.
If they were clos'd in sleep, a silly fly
Would, with its slightest murmurings, make me start,
And wake me to more fears. For thy dear sake
All this I suffer'd: but my jocund heart
Forgets it all, whilst I behold my lord,
My guardian, the strong anchor of my hope,
The stately column that supports my house,
Dear as an only child to a fond parent;
Welcome as land, which the toss'd mariner
Beyond his hope descries; welcome as day
After a night of storms with fairer beams
Returning; welcome as the liquid lapse
Of fountain to the thirsty traveller:
So pleasant is it to escape the chain
Of hard constraint. Such greeting I esteem
Due to thy honour: let it not offend,
For I have suffer'd much. But, my lov'd lord,
Leave now that car; nor on the bare ground set
That royal foot, beneath whose mighty tread
Troy trembled. Haste, ye virgins, to whose care

This pleasing office is intrusted, spread
The streets with tapestry; let the ground be cover'd
With richest purple, leading to the palace;
That honour with just state may grace his entry,
Though unexpected. My attentive care,
Shall, if the gods permit, dispose the rest
To welcome his high glories, as I ought.

AGAMEMNON.

Daughter of Leda, guardian of my house (41),
Thy words are correspondent to my absence,
Of no small length. With better grace my praise
Would come from others: sooth me not with strains
Of adulation, as a girl; nor raise,
As to some proud barbaric king, that loves
Loud acclamations echoed from the mouths
Of prostrate worshippers, a clamorous welcome:
Nor spread the streets with tapestry; 'tis invidious;
These are the honours we should pay the gods.
For mortal man to tread on ornaments
Of rich embroid'ry——No: I dare not do it:
Respect me as a man, not as a god.
Why should my foot pollute these vests, that glow
With various tinctur'd radiance? My full fame
Swells high without it; and the temperate rule
Of cool discretion is the choicest gift
Of fav'ring Heav'n. Happy the man, whose life

(41) Agamemnon appears here in the most amiable light; he knows his dignity, and is not insensible to the fame which attends him as the conqueror of Asia; but by reproving the excessive adulation of Clytemnestra, he shows that manly firmness of mind, that becoming moderation, which distinguishes the sober state of the king of Argos from the barbaric pride of an Asiatic monarch. The part, which he has to act, is short, but it gives us a picture of the highest military glory, and of true regal virtue, and shows us that as a man he was modest, gentle, and humane.

Is spent in friendship's calm security.
These sober joys be mine, I ask no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Do not thou thwart the purpose of my mind.

AGAMEMNON.

My mind, be well assur'd, shall not be tainted.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hast thou in fear made to the gods this vow?

AGAMEMNON.

Free, from my soul in prudence have I said it.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Had Priam's arms prevail'd, how had he acted?

AGAMEMNON.

On rich embroid'ry he had proudly trod.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then dread not thou th' invidious tongues of men.

AGAMEMNON.

Yet has the popular voice much potency.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But the unenvied is not of the happy.

AGAMEMNON.

Ill suits it thy soft sex to love contention.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

To yield sometimes adds honour to the mighty.

AGAMEMNON.

Art thou so earnest to obtain thy wish?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Let me prevail: indulge me with this conquest.

AGAMEMNON.

If such thy will, haste some one, from my feet
Unloose these high-bound buskins, lest some god
Look down indignant, if with them I press

These vests sea-tinctur'd: shame it were to spoil
With unclean tread their rich and costly texture.
Of these enough.—This stranger, let her find
A gentle treatment: from high heav'n the God
Looks with an eye of favour on the victor
That bears his high state meekly; for none wears
Of his free choice the yoke of slavery.
And she, of many treasures the prime flower
Selected by the troops, has follow'd me.
Well, since I yield me vanquish'd by thy voice,
I go, treading on purple, to my house.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Does not the sea, and who shall drain it, yield
Unfailing stores of these rich tints, that glow
With purple radiance? These this lordly house
Commands, blest with abundance, but to want
A stranger. I had vow'd his foot should tread
On many a vestment, when the victims bled,
The hallow'd pledge which this fond breast devis'd
For his return. For whilst the vig'rous root
Maintains its grasp, the stately head shall rise,
And with its waving foliage screen the house
From the fierce dog-star's fiery pestilence.
And on thy presence at thy household hearth,
Ev'n the cold winter feels a genial warmth.
But when the hot sun in the unripe grape (42)

(42) This passage is difficult. The context is this, whilst the root remains (meaning the husband) the branches reach to the house, and spread a shade over it against the heat of the dog-star. There is an image of this nature in Charactacus far superior to this of Æschylus,

Hail, hallow'd oaks!—Happy foresters,
Ye with your tough and interwisted roots,
Grasp the firm rocks ye sprung from, and, erect
In knotty hardihood, still proudly spread

Matures the wine, the husband's perfect virtues
Spread a refreshing coolness. Thou, O Jove,
Source of perfection, perfect all my vows,
And with thy influence favour my intents!

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

What may this mean (43)? Along the skies
Why do these dreadful portents roll?
Visions of terror, spare my aching eyes,
Nor shake my sad presaging soul!

Your leafy banners 'gainst the tyrannous north,
Who Roman like assails you.

Clytemnestra goes on, When thou art present at thy domestic hearth, thou spreadest a warmth even in the winter; and in the hottest season the husband's presence gives a refreshing coolness to the house; the first image is of protection, the other two of agreeableness like this of Ovid,

Solibus hibernis, æstivâ gratior umbrâ.

The expression in the original is highly metaphorical, "when Jupiter forms the "wine from the unripe grape," which means no more than to denote the autumnal heat; it being no uncommon thing for an original rusticity of conception to be turned into parade and ornament.

And now, having mentioned her husband under the usual epithet of *the perfect* (See Stanley on the Supp. v. 82. and on this place: hence their Ζεὺς τέλειος, and Ἥρη τέλεια, as presiding over marriages), she artfully addresses Jupiter, as the source of perfection, to perfect her intent: this play on the word is the ebullition of her heated imagination, impatient to execute her horrid purpose, as the opportunity was now arrived; and is another instance of that ambiguity with which this artful and determined woman took a pride in concealing her thoughts under the very words that expressed them.

(43) The learned reader is sufficiently sensible of the difficulty of this strophe; the translator understands it differently from the annotators, adhering however to Pauw's interpretation of time and place, which is supported against Mr. Heath by the last two lines. The Chorus, under the power of an immediate inspiration, in the sublimest style of poetry, is struck with visions of terror, Δείγμα προστατήριον, that fill his heart with presages, and compel him to utter the prophetic strain ἀκέλευστος, ἄμισθος. Indeed no hope, in which he could confide, had touched his heart since the fleet sailed from Aulis, and the troops advanced to Troy.

In accents dread, not tun'd in vain,
Why bursts the free, unbidden strain?
These are no phantoms of the night,
That vanish at the faithful light
Of steadfast confidence. Thou sober power,
Whither, ah, whither art thou gone?
For since the long-pass'd hour,
When first for Troy the naval band
Unmoor'd their vessels from the strand,
Thou hast not in my bosom fix'd thy throne.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

At length they come (44): these faithful eyes,
See them return'd to Greece again:
Yet, while the sullen lyre in silence lies,
Erinnys wakes the mournful strain:
Her dreadful powers possess my soul,
And bid the untaught measures roll;
Swell in rude notes the dismal lay,
And fright enchanting Hope away;
Whilst, ominous of ill, grim-visag'd Care
Incessant whirls my tortur'd heart.
Vain be each anxious fear!
Return, fair Hope, thy seat resume,
Dispel this melancholy gloom,
And to my soul thy gladsome light impart!

STROPHE 2.

Ah me, what hope! This mortal state (45)
Nothing but cruel change can know.

(44) Now indeed I see they are returned (continues the Chorus), yet Erinnys begins the strain, without waiting for the accompaniment of the lyre. Every idea is gloomy and hopeless; yet he wishes that his fears may be vain.

(45) In the mutable state of human life, sickness is the contiguous neighbour to health; the bark in its fairest course is driven on a rock; and sloth dissi-

Should cheerful Health our vig'rous steps await,
Enkindling all her roseate glow;
Disease creeps on with silent pace,
And withers ev'ry blooming grace.
Proud sails the bark; the fresh gales breathe,
And dash her on the rocks beneath.
In the rich house her treasures Plenty pours;
Comes Sloth, and from her well-pois'd sling
Scatters the piled up stores.
Yet Disease makes not all her prey:
Nor sinks the bark beneath the sea:
And Famine sees the heav'n-sent harvest spring.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

But when forth-welling from the wound (46)
The purple-streaming blood shall fall,
And the warm tide distain the reeking ground,
Who shall the vanish'd life recall?
Nor verse, nor music's magic pow'r,
Nor the fam'd leech's boasted lore;
Not that his art restor'd the dead,
Jove's thunder burst upon his head.—

pates the greatest wealth: yet the whole house does not fall under the disease; the bark is not swallowed up by the sea; and Jupiter has many ways to restore the wasted wealth.

(46) But when man's warm blood streams upon the ground, what charm can recall his life? Not even Æsculapius himself, whom Jupiter did not prevent, through jealousy, of his life-restoring art. And now, having uttered this ominous presage of blood and death, prohibent jam cætera Parcæ scire, the inspiration ceases, and he becomes dark and silent. This ode is conceived in the sublimest spirit of poetry, yet that is but its second excellence; it receives its first grace from propriety. As the odes in this tragedy necessarily contract an obscurity from their prophetic turn, and have been generally complained of as being almost unintelligible, the reader, it is hoped, will not be displeased at these attempts to elucidate them.

But that the Fates forbid, and chain my tongue,
My heart, at inspiration's call,
Would the rapt strain prolong:
Now all is dark; it raves in vain,
And, as it pants with trembling pain,
Desponding feels its fiery transports fall.

CLYTEMNESTRA, CASSANDRA, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou too, Cassandra, enter; since high Jove,
Gracious to thee, hath plac'd thee in this house (47),
With many slaves to share the common rites,
And deck the altar of the fav'ring god.
Come from that chariot, and let temperance rule
Thy lofty spirit: ev'n Alcmena's son (48),

(47) Stanley reads ἀμηνίτως, Auratus ἀμηνίτοις: Nescio quare, says Pauw: Ego igitur dicam, says Heath; Quia non ἀμηνίτως, sine irâ, Jupiter videbatur potuisse statuere Cassandram ex reginâ servam in inimicorum patriæque suæ vastatorum ædibus. One should be cautious in opposing the fine taste of Stanley. Clytemnestra tells Cassandra that her office should be to stand at the altar of Jupiter; which was the most honourable department that could be given to captives of rank; the Phœnissæ of Euripides were in this manner devoted to the Pythian Apollo; and Manto, the celebrated daughter of Tiresias, was sent to Delphos by Alcmæon, when he took Thebes: Jupiter therefore was gracious to Cassandra, by thus alleviating her misfortunes.

(48) Hercules had demanded in marriage Iole, the daughter of Eurytus king of Œchalia: the father desired time to determine; which Hercules considered as a refusal, and in revenge privately led away some fine horses of the king. His son, Iphitus, suspecting that Hercules had taken them, went to Tyrinthia in search of them. Hercules took him to the top of a high tower, and bade him look around to see if he could discover them; but Iphitus not seeing them, Hercules said that he was wrongfully accused, and threw the prince from the tower: being seized with some malady, as a punishment for this murder, and the usual expiations not availing, he consulted the oracle of Apollo, who told him that he must publicly sell himself for a slave, and send the money arising from the sale to the children of Iphitus: his malady continuing, he went into Asia, there voluntarily suffered one of his friends to sell him, and became the slave of Omphale, daughter of Jardanus, and queen of the Meonians. M. Court de Gebelin, Allegories Orientales, p. 164.

Sold as a slave, submitted to the yoke
Perforce; and if necessity's hard hand
Hath sunk thee to this fortune, our high rank,
With greatness long acquainted, knows to use
Its power with gentleness: the low-born wretch (49),
That from his mean degree rises at once
To unexpected riches, treats his slaves
With barbarous and unbounded insolence.
From us thou wilt receive a juster treatment.

CHORUS.

These are plain truths: since in the toils of fate
Thou art enclos'd, submit, if thou canst brook
Submission; haply I advise in vain.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If that her language, like the twittering swallow's (50),
Be not all barbarous and unknown, my words
Within shall with persuasion move her mind.

CHORUS.

She speaks what best beseems thy present state;
Follow, submit, and leave that lofty car.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have not leisure here before the gates
T' attend on her; for at the inmost altar,
Blazing with sacred fires, the victims stand
Devoted to the gods for his return

(49) This bad woman, we see, was capable of the generous sentiments becoming her high rank, but her ungoverned passions extinguished them all. Probably she was not the first that had descanted on the insolence of upstart wealth; certainly she is not the last, who has reason to observe of persons suddenly enriched, "that they have not had their money long enough to be gentlemen."

(50) Mr. Heath well observes that the ancient Grecians called all nations, that spoke not "the sweet Helladic tongue," swallows. The last line of this speech is another instance of the double sense, where more is meant than meets the ear.

So much beyond our hopes. If to comply
Thou form thy mind, delay not: if thy tongue
Knows not to sound our language, let thy signs
Supply the place of words, speak with thy hand.

CHORUS.

Of foreign birth she understands us not;
But as new taken struggles in the net.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis phrensy this, the impulse of a mind
Disorder'd; from a city lately taken
She comes, and knows not how to bear the curb,
Till she has spent her rage in bloody foam (51).
But I no more waste words to be disdain'd.

CHORUS.

My words, for much I pity her, shall bear (52)
No mark of anger. Go, unhappy fair one,
Forsake thy chariot, unreluctant learn
To bear this new yoke of necessity.

CASSANDRA.

Wo, wo! O Earth! Apollo, O Apollo!

CHORUS.

Why with that voice of wo invoke Apollo?
Ill do these notes of grief accord with him (53).

(51) As this is the last, so is it the strongest instance of the double sense before observed; and her passion here carries it as far as could be, without endangering a discovery:

She's gone, a manifest serpent by her sting
Discover'd in the end, till now conceal'd.

(52) The Chorus, as it became them, express themselves with tenderness and humanity to the unhappy princess: this introduces a scene the finest perhaps that tragedy has yet known. It would be an affront to the understanding of the reader to point out the nice gradation of the prophetic fury; and that heart must be hard indeed, which does not feel the pathos.

(53) Θρηνώδίαι, strains of mourning, were proper only to the infernal gods.

CASSANDRA.

Wo, wo! O Earth! Apollo, O Apollo!

CHORUS.

Again her inauspicious voice invokes
The god, whose ears are not attun'd to wo.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo, O Apollo, fatal leader,
Yet once more, god, thou leadest me to ruin!

CHORUS.

She seems prophetic of her own misfortunes,
Retaining, though a slave, the divine spirit(54).

CASSANDRA.

Apollo, O Apollo, fatal leader,
Ah, whither hast thou led me? to what house?

CHORUS.

Is that unknown? Let me declare it then:
This is the royal mansion of th' Atridæ.

CASSANDRA.

It is a mansion hated by the gods,
Conscious to many' a foul and horrid deed;
A slaughter-house, that reeks with human gore.

CHORUS.

This stranger seems, like the nice-scented hound,
Quick in the trace of blood, which she will find.

CASSANDRA.

These are convincing proofs. Look there, look there,
Whilst pity drops a tear, the children butcher'd(55),
The father feasting on their roasted flesh!

(54) The free spirit of Greece breathes in this; it thought that the day, which saw a man a slave, took away half his virtues.

(55) Oracular as the words of Cassandra are, they sufficiently, for the present purpose, express the feast of Thyestes. A proper place will be found to give the full history of the house of Atreus.

CHORUS.

Thy fame, prophetic virgin, we have heard;
We know thy skill; but wish no prophets now.

CASSANDRA.

Ye powers of Heav'n, what does she now design?
What new and dreadful deed of wo is this?
What dreadful ill designs she in the house,
Intolerable, irreparable mischief,
Whilst far she sends the succouring power away?

CHORUS.

These prophecies surpass my apprehension:
The first I knew, they echo through the city.

CASSANDRA.

Ah! daring wretch, dost thou achieve this deed,
Thus in the bath the partner of thy bed
Refreshing? How shall I relate th' event?
Yet speedy shall it be. Ev'n now advanc'd
Hand above hand extended threatens high.

CHORUS.

I comprehend her not; her words are dark,
Perplexing me like abstruse oracles.

CASSANDRA.

Ha! What is this, that I see here before me?
Is it the net of hell? Or rather hers,
Who shares the bed, and plans the murderous deed.
Let Discord, whose insatiable rage
Pursues this race, howl through the royal rooms
Against the victim destin'd to destruction.

CHORUS.

What Fury dost thou call within this house
To hold her orgies? The dread invocation

Appals me (56); to my heart the purple drops
Flow back; a deathlike mist covers my eyes,
With expectation of some sudden ruin.

CASSANDRA.

See, see there: from the heifer keep the bull!—
O'er his black brows she throws th' entangling vest,
And smites him with her huge two-handed engine.
He falls, amidst the cleansing laver falls:
I tell thee of the bath, the treach'rous bath.

CHORUS.

T' unfold the obscure oracles of Heav'n
Is not my boast; beneath the shadowing veil
Misfortune lies: when did th' inquirer learn
From the dark sentence an event of joy?
From time's first records the diviner's voice
Gives the sad heart a sense of misery.

CASSANDRA.

Ah me unhappy? Wretched, wretched fate!
For my own sufferings join'd call forth these wailings.
Why hast thou brought me hither? Wretched me!
Is it for this, that I may die with him?

CHORUS.

This is the phrensy of a mind possess'd
With wildest ravings. Thy own woes thou wailest
In mournful melody; like the sweet bird,

(56) This passage is exceedingly difficult, where the author intended no obscurity; which shows the present reading to be corrupt. Pauw has at least made sense of it, which we readily embrace till a better can be found: but it is his hard fate always to be reprobated; therefore Mr. Heath refers the χροχοβάφης σταγὼν, which the context requires us to apply to the Chorus, to Cassandra, as if through the force of the prophetic fury she had fallen to the ground in a trance; whereas it is the critic that is in a deliquium.

That darkling pours her never-ceasing plaint;
And for her Itys, her lost Itys (57), wastes
In sweetest wo her melancholy life.

CASSANDRA.

Ah me! the fortune of the nightingale
Is to be envied: on her light-pois'd plumes
She wings at will her easy way, nor knows
The anguish of a tear, whilst o'er my head
Th' impending sword threatens the fatal wound.

CHORUS.

Whence is this violent, this wild presage
Of ill? Thy fears are vain; yet with a voice
That terrifies, though sweet, aloud thou speakest
Thy sorrows. Whence hast thou deriv'd these omens,
Thus deeply mark'd with characters of death?

CASSANDRA.

Alas the bed, the bridal bed of Paris,
Destructive to his friends! Paternal stream,
Scamander, on thy banks with careless steps
My childhood stray'd: but now methinks I go,
Alas, how soon! to prophesy around
Cocytus, and the banks of Acheron!

(57) Tereus, king of Thrace, had married Procne, the daughter of Pandion king of Athens: afterwards, inflamed with lust, he deflowered Philomela, the sister of Procne, and to prevent a discovery cut out her tongue, and confined her in a hunting-seat in a wood; the injured lady wrought her story in the loom, and contrived to send the web to her sister. Procne, pretending the rites of Bacchus, attended with a female train, burst open the gates of the lodge, and carried her sister to the palace; there they killed Itys, the son of Tereus and Procne, and served him up as a feast to his father; when he had satiated his hunger, and called for his son, Procne told him what she had done; Philomela, at the same time, besmeared with blood, rushed into the room, and threw the head of Itys in his face. Tereus pursuing the sisters with his drawn sword was changed into a Lapwing, Procne into a Swallow, and Philomela into a Nightingale. Thus Ovid tells the story; but Æschylus, and after him Euripides and Sophocles, represent Procne as changed into the Nightingale.

CHORUS.

Perspicuous this, and clear! the new-born babe
Might comprehend it; but thy piercing griefs,
Bewailing thus the miseries of thy fate,
Strike deep; they wound me to my very soul.

CASSANDRA.

Ah my poor country, my poor bleeding country,
Fall'n, fall'n for ever! And you, sacred altars,
That blaz'd before my father's tower'd palace,
Not all your victims could avert your doom!
And on the earth soon shall my warm blood flow.

CHORUS.

This is consistent with thy former ravings.
Or does some god indeed incumbent press
Thy soul, and modulate thy voice to utter
These lamentable notes of wo and death?
What the event shall be, exceeds my knowledge.

CASSANDRA.

The oracle no more shall shroud its visage
Beneath a veil, as a new bride that blushes
To meet the gazing eye; but like the sun,
When with his orient ray he gilds the east,
Shall burst upon you in a flood of light,
Disclosing deeds of deeper dread. Away,
Ye mystic coverings! And you, reverend men,
Bear witness to me, that with steady step
I trace foul deeds that smell above the earth.
For never shall that band, whose yelling notes
In dismal accord pierce th' affrighted ear,
Forsake this house. The genius of the feast,
Drunk with the blood of men, and fir'd from thence
To bolder daring, ranges through the rooms
Link'd with his kindred Furies: these possess

The mansion, and in horrid measures chant
The first base deed (58); recording with abhorrence
Th' adulterous lust, that stain'd a brother's bed.
What, like a skilful archer, have I lodg'd
My arrow in the mark? No trifling this,
T' alarm you with false sounds. But swear to me,
In solemn attestation, that I know,
And speak the old offences of this house.

CHORUS.

In such a rooted ill what healing pow'r
Resides there in an oath? But much I marvel
That thou, the native of a foreign realm,
Of foreign tongue, canst speak our language freely,
As Greece had been thy constant residence.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo grac'd me with this skill. At first
The curb of modesty was on my tongue.

CHORUS.

Did the god feel the force of young desire?
In each gay breast ease fans the wanton flame.

CASSANDRA.

With all the fervour of impatient love
He strove to gratify my utmost wish.

CHORUS.

And didst thou listen to his tempting lures?

CASSANDRA.

First I assented, then deceiv'd the god.

CHORUS.

Wast thou then fraught with these prophetic arts?

(58) By this first base deed, Pauw understands the horrid feast at which Atreus entertained his brother Thyestes; Heath, the murder of Myrtilus, of which there is no mention by Æschylus: it relates to the adultery of Thyestes with his brother's wife, the fatal cause of all the subsequent evils.

CASSANDRA.

Ev'n then I told my country all its woes.

CHORUS.

The anger of the god fell heavy on thee?

CASSANDRA.

My voice, for this offence, lost all persuasion.

CHORUS.

To us it seems a voice of truth divine.

CASSANDRA.

Wo, wo is me! Again the furious pow'r
Swells in my lab'ring breast; again commands
My bursting voice; and what I speak is Fate.—
Look, look, behold those children.—There they sit;
Such are the forms, that in the troubled night
Distract our sleep.—By a friend's hands they died:
Are these the ties of blood?—See, in their hands
Their mangled limbs, horrid repast, they bear:
Th' invited father shares th' accursed feast.
For this the sluggard savage, that at ease
Rolls on his bed, nor rouses from his lair,
'Gainst my returning lord, for I must wear
The yoke of slavery, plans the dark design
Of death. Ah me! the chieftain of the fleet,
The vanquisher of Troy, but little knows
What the smooth tongue of mischief, fil'd to words
Of glozing courtesy, with Fate her friend,
Like Ate ranging in the dark can do
Calmly: such deeds a woman dares: she dares
Murder a man. What shall I call this mischief?
An Amphisbæna? or a Scylla rather,
That in the vex'd rocks holds her residence,
And meditates the mariner's destruction?
Mother of Hell, 'midst friends enkindling discord.

And hate implacable! With dreadful daring
How did she shout, as if the battle swerv'd?
Yet with feign'd joy she welcomes his return.—
These words may want persuasion. What of that?
What must come, will come: and ere long with grief
Thou shalt confess my prophecies are true.

CHORUS.

Thyestes' bloody feast oft have I heard of,
Always with horror; and I tremble now
Hearing th' unaggravated truth. What else
She utters, leads my wand'ring thoughts astray
In wild uncertainty.

CASSANDRA.

Then mark me well,
Thou shalt behold the death of Agamemnon.

CHORUS.

To better omens tune that voice unbless'd,
Or in eternal silence be it sunk.

CASSANDRA.

This is an ill no medicine can heal.

CHORUS.

Not if it happens: but avert it, Heav'n!

CASSANDRA.

To pray be thine; the murd'rous deed is theirs.

CHORUS.

What man dares perpetrate this dreadful act?

CASSANDRA.

How widely dost thou wander from my words?

CHORUS.

I heard not whose bold hand should do the deed.

CASSANDRA.

Yet speak I well the language of your Greece.

CHORUS.

The gift of Phœbus this; no trivial grace.

CASSANDRA.

Ah, what a sudden flame comes rushing on me!
I burn, I burn. Apollo, O Apollo!
This lioness, that in a sensual sty
Roll'd with the wolf, the generous lion absent,
Will kill me. And the sorc'ress, as she brews
Her philtred cup, will drug it with my blood.
She glories, as against her husband's life
She whets the axe, her vengeance falls on him
For that he came accompanied by me.—
Why do I longer wear these useless honours,
This laurel wand, and these prophetic wreaths?
Away; before I die I cast you from me;
Lie there, and perish; I am rid of you;
Or deck the splendid ruin of some other.
Apollo rends from me these sacred vestments,
Who saw me in his rich habiliments
Mock'd midst my friends, doubtless without a cause.
When in opprobrious terms they jeer'd my skill,
And treated me as a poor vagrant wretch,
That told events from door to door for bread,
I bore it all: but now the prophet god,
That with his own arts grac'd me, sinks me down
To this low ruin. As my father fell
Butcher'd ev'n at the altar, like the victim's
My warm blood at the altar shall be shed:
Nor shall we die unhonour'd by the gods.
He comes, dreadful in punishment, the son
Of this bad mother, by her death t' avenge
His murder'd father: distant though he roams,
An outcast and an exile, by his friends

Fenc'd from these deeds of violence, he comes
In solemn vengeance for his father laid
Thus low.—But why for foreign miseries
Does the tear darken in my eye, that saw
The fall of Ilium, and its haughty conqu'rors
In righteous judgement thus receive their meed?
But forward now; I go to close the scene,
Nor shrink from death. I have a vow in heav'n:
And further I adjure these gates of hell,
Well may the blow be aim'd, that whilst my blood
Flows in a copious stream, I may not feel
The fierce, convulsive agonies of death;
But gently sink, and close my eyes in peace.

CHORUS.

Unhappy, in thy knowledge most unhappy,
Long have thy sorrows flow'd. But if indeed
Thou dost foresee thy death, why, like the heifer
Led by a heav'nly impulse, do thy steps
Advance thus boldly to the cruel altar?

CASSANDRA.

I could not by delay escape my fate.

CHORUS.

Yet is there some advantage in delay.

CASSANDRA.

The day is come: by flight I should gain little.

CHORUS.

Thy boldness adds to thy unhappiness.

CASSANDRA.

None of the happy shuns his destin'd end.

CHORUS.

True; but to die with glory crowns our praise.

CASSANDRA.

So died my father, so his noble sons.

CHORUS.

What may this mean? Why backward dost thou start?
Do thy own thoughts with horror strike thy soul?

CASSANDRA.

The scent of blood and death breathes from this house.

CHORUS.

The victims now are bleeding at the altar.

CASSANDRA.

'Tis such a smell as issues from the tomb.

CHORUS.

This is no Syrian odour in the house.

CASSANDRA.

Such though it be, I enter, to bewail
My fate, and Agamemnon's. To have liv'd,
Let it suffice. And think not, gen'rous strangers,
Like the poor bird that flutters o'er the bough,
Through fear I linger. But my dying words
You will remember, when her blood shall flow
For mine, woman's for woman's: and the man's,
For his that falls by his accursed wife.

CHORUS.

Thy fate, poor sufferer, fills my eyes with tears.

CASSANDRA.

Yet once more let me raise my mournful voice.
Thou Sun, whose rising beams shall bless no more
These closing eyes! You, whose vindictive rage
Hangs o'er my hated murderers, oh avenge me,
Though, a poor slave, I fall an easy prey!
This is the state of man: in prosperous fortune
A shadow, passing light, throws to the ground (59)

(59) This is the finest image that ever entered a poet's imagination; the words seem incapable of any other interpretation than what is here given them; accordingly Grotius translates them thus:

Joy's baseless fabric: in adversity
Comes malice with a spunge moisten'd in gall,
And wipes each beauteous character away:
More than the first this melts my soul to pity.

CHORUS.

By nature man is form'd with boundless wishes
For prosperous fortune; and the great man's door
Stands ever open to that envied person,
On whom she smiles; but enter not with words,
Like this poor sufferer, of such dreadful import.
His arms the pow'rs of Heav'n have grac'd with conquest;
Troy's proud walls lie in dust; and he returns
Crown'd by the gods with glory: but if now
His blood must for the blood there shed atone (60),

Heu tristia hominum fata! nam res prosperas
Vel umbra facile evertat, infelicium
Imaginem omnem spongiæ delet mador.

Only for ϛολαῖς, Stanley wishes to read μόλις, Pauw λωϐαῖς; the translator too has his conjecture. Then comes Mr. Heath, and makes a difficulty where no one ever suspected one; he retains the obnoxious word ϛολαῖς, on which to build his criticism; and to our great surprise, we are suddenly entertained with a game of backgammon; if the cast be a good one, as the dice are easily overturned, so human prosperity is subverted even by a shadow: if the cast be unlucky, then a sponge wipes out the unfortunate condition of those that threw it: by γραφήν he would willingly understand the figures impressed on the sides of the dice; but as these may not so easily be wiped out with a sponge, he is well inclined to think, that it means the chalk with which the players of ancient, as well as modern times, scored their games. It is peculiarly unfortunate, that this learned person could find nothing to his purpose in Pollux, Meursius, Salmasius, and Souterius, whom he consulted on this occasion. But this is not the first time this favourite annotator put his extinguisher over the flaming spirit of Æschylus.

(60) These words are ill understood, as alluding to the murder of Myrtilus, the supper of Thyestes, and the other horrid deeds of the house of Pelops; they refer to a melancholy observation of the Chorus in a former ode:

For never with unheedful eyes,
When slaughter'd thousands bleed,
Did the just pow'rs of heaven regard
The carnage of th' ensanguin'd plain.

If he must die for those that died, too dearly
He buys his triumph. Who of mortal men
Hears this, and dares to think his state secure?

AGAMEMNON, *within.*

Oh! I am wounded with a deadly blow.

SEMICHORUS.

List, list. What cry is this of wounds and death?

AGAMEMNON.

Wounded again, Oh, basely, basely murder'd!

SEMICHORUS.

'Tis the king's cry; the dreadful deed is doing.
What shall we do? What measures shall we form?

SEMICHORUS.

What if we spread th' alarm, and with our outcries
Call at the palace gates the citizens?

SEMICHORUS.

Nay rather rush we in, and prove the deed,
Whilst the fresh blood is reeking on the sword.

SEMICHORUS.

I readily concur; determine then;
For something must be done, and instantly.

SEMICHORUS.

That's evident. This bloody prelude threatens
More deeds of violence and tyranny.

SEMICHORUS.

We linger: those that tread the paths of honour,
Late though she meets them, sleep not in their task.

SEMICHORUS.

Perplexity and doubt distract my thoughts:
Deeds of high import ask maturest counsel.

SEMICHORUS.

Such are my thoughts, since fruitless were th' attempt
By all our pleas to raise the dead to life.

SEMICHORUS.

To save our wretched lives then shall we bow
To these imperious lords, these stains of honour?

SEMICHORUS.

That were a shame indeed: No; let us die:
Death is more welcome than such tyranny.

SEMICHORUS.

Shall we then take these outcries, which we heard,
For proofs, and thence conclude the king is slain?

SEMICHORUS.

We should be well assur'd e'er we pronounce:
To know, and to conjecture, differ widely.

SEMICHORUS.

There's reason in thy words. Best enter then,
And see what fate attends the son of Atreus.

CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

To many' a fair speech suited to the times (61)

(61) The irresolution of the Chorus is here relieved by the entrance of Clytemnestra. Having perpetrated the bloody deed, she throws off the disguise, and appears at once in her real character, determined and daring in her designs, calm, intrepid, and bidding defiance to the consequences. She triumphs in the deed, and takes a pride in recounting her deep-laid treachery, and the particulars of its execution. Not satisfied with killing her husband, she mangled him when dead, which she calls a sacrifice to Pluto, and glories in the blood with which she was stained; nay, would decency permit it, she would even make libations over the dead, which Mr. Heath judiciously explains, by telling us, that it was a custom among the ancients, after the defeat of their enemies, to pour libations to the gods their deliverers, in gratitude for their victory and freedom. Thus Hector says, Il. vi. ult.

> These ills shall cease, whene'er by Jove's decree
> We crown the bowl to Heav'n and liberty;
> While the proud foe his frustrate triumphs mourns,
> And Greece indignant through her seas returns.—POPE.

The allusion to this bowl is finely carried on, and gives an air of solemnity to her speech, which breathes the genuine spirit of Æschylus.

If my words now be found at variance,
I shall not blush. For when the heart conceives
Thoughts of deep vengeance on a foe, what means
T' achieve the deed more certain, than to wear
The form of friendship, and with circling wiles
Enclose him in th' insuperable net?
This was no hasty, rash-conceiv'd design;
But form'd with deep, premeditated thought,
Incens'd with wrongs; and often have I stood,
T' assay the execution, where he fell;
And plann'd it so, for I with pride avow it,
He had no pow'r t' escape, or to resist,
Entangled in the gorgeous robe, that shone
Fatally rich. I struck him twice, and twice
He groan'd, then died. A third time as he lay
I gored him with a wound, a grateful present
To the stern god, that in the realms below
Reigns o'er the dead: there let him take his seat.
He lay; and spouting from his wounds a stream
Of blood, bedew'd me with these crimson drops.
I glory in them, like the genial earth,
When the warm show'rs of heav'n descend, and wake
The flow'rets to unfold their vermeil leaves.
Come then, ye reverend senators of Argos,
Joy with me, if your hearts be tun'd to joy;
And such I wish them. Were it decent now
To pour libations o'er the dead, with justice
It might be done; for his injurious pride
Fill'd for this house the cup of desolation,
Fated himself to drain it to the dregs.

CHORUS.

We are astonish'd at thy daring words,
Thus vaunting o'er the ruins of thy husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Me, like a witless woman, wouldst thou fright?
I tell thee, my firm soul disdains to fear.
Be thou dispos'd t' applaud, or censure me,
I reck it not: there Agamemnon lies,
My husband, slaughter'd by this hand: I dare
Avow his death, and justify the deed.

CHORUS.

What poison hath the baleful-teeming earth (62),
Or the chaf'd billows of the foamy sea,
Giv'n thee for food, or mingled in thy cup,
To work thee to this phrensy? Thy curs'd hand
Hath struck, hath slain. For this thy country's wrath
Shall in just vengeance burst upon thy head,
And with abhorrence drive thee from the city.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And dost thou now denounce upon my head
Vengeance, and hate, and exile? 'Gainst this man
Urging no charge? Yet he without remorse,
As if a lamb that wanton'd in his pastures
Were doom'd to bleed, could sacrifice his daughter,
For whose dear sake I felt a mother's pains,
T' appease the winds of Thrace. Should not thy voice
Adjudge this man to exile, in just vengeance
For such unholy deeds? Scarce hast thou heard

(62) It would not be easy to account for the irresolution of the Chorus before, but that it was in the Fates that Cassandra should never be believed, and the catastrophe was not to be prevented: we must observe however, that there was nothing of timidity in it, nothing that shows their unwillingness to undergo even the least danger for the sake of saving, or avenging their king: the spirit of Æschylus revolts at the supposition: and these tame old men, though the danger was now imminent to themselves, brave the queen to her face, and even threaten her and Ægisthus with the vengeance of the state: this free and manly spirit is well supported to the end.

What I have done, but sentence is pronounc'd,
And that with rigour too. But mark me well,
I boldly tell thee that I bear a soul
Prepar'd for either fortune; if thy hand
Be stronger, use thy pow'r: but if the gods
Prosper my cause, be thou assur'd, old man,
Thou shalt be taught a lesson of discretion.

CHORUS.

Aspiring are thy thoughts, and thy proud vaunts
Swell with disdain; ev'n yet thy madding mind
Is drunk with slaughter; with a savage grace
The thick blood stains thine eye. But soon thy friends
Faithless shall shrink from thy unshelter'd side,
And leave thee to just vengeance, blow for blow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hear then this solemn oath: By that revenge,
Which for my daughter I have greatly taken;
By the dread pow'rs of Ate and Erinnys,
To whom my hand devoted him a victim,
Without a thought of fear I range these rooms,
Whilst present to my aid Ægisthus stands,
As he hath stood, guarding my social hearth:
He is my shield, my strength, my confidence.
Here lies my base betrayer, who at Troy
Could revel in the arms of each Chryseis;
He, and his captive minion; she that mark'd
Portents and prodigies, and with ominous tongue
Presag'd the Fates; a wanton harlotry,
True to the rower's benches: their just meed
Have they receiv'd. See where he lies; and she,
That like the swan warbled her dying notes (63),

(63) As the swan, living or dying, is a very unmusical bird, it has been the subject of wonder whence the idea of his melody at his death should arise. Lucian is

His paranymph lies with him, to my bed
Leaving the darling object of my wishes.

CHORUS.

No slow-consuming pains, to torture us
Fix'd to the groaning couch, await us now;
But Fate comes rushing on, and brings the sleep
That wakes no more. There lies the king, whose virtues
Were truly royal. In a woman's cause
He suffer'd much; and by a woman perish'd.
Ah fatal Helen! in the fields of Troy
How many has thy guilt, thy guilt alone,
Stretch'd in the dust? But now by murd'rous hands
Hast thou sluic'd out this rich and noble blood,
Whose foul stains never can be purg'd. This ruin
Hath discord, raging in the house, effected.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Wish not for death; nor bow beneath thy griefs;

very pleasant on the occasion; the κύκνειον ᾆσμα became a proverb; and not only the poets, but even grave and philosophical writers have suffered themselves to be led away by it. The reader, who may not be acquainted with Mr. Bryant's works, will be pleased to see his very ingenius solution of this difficulty. "In all the "places where the emigrants from Canaan, whose insigne was the swan, settled, "they were famous for their hymns and music: all which the Greeks transferred "to birds, and supposed that they were swans, who were gifted with this har- "mony. When, therefore, Plutarch tells us, that Apollo was pleased with the "music of swans, and when Æschylus mentions their singing their own dirges, "they certainly allude to Egyptian and Canaanitish priests, who lamented the "death of Adon and Osiris."——Analysis, vol. i. p. 380.—Hence our incomparable Milton:

Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allur'd
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In am'rous ditties all a summer's day;
While smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea, suppos'd with blood
Of Thammuz yearly wounded.

Nor turn thy rage on Helen, as if she
Had drench'd the fields with blood, as she alone
Fatal to Greece had caus'd these dreadful ills.

CHORUS.

Tremendous fiend, that breathest through this house
Thy baleful spirit, and with equal daring (64)
Hast steel'd these royal sisters to fierce deeds
That rend my soul, now, like the baleful raven,
Incumbent o'er the body dost thou joy
T' affright us with thy harsh and dissonant notes!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

There's sense in this: now hast thou touch'd the key,
Rousing the Fury that from sire to son
Hath bade the stream of blood, first pour'd by her,
Descend: one sanguine tide scarce roll'd away,
Another flows in terrible succession.

CHORUS.

And dost thou glory in these deeds of death,

(64) The Chorus had before compared together the deeds of these two daughters of Tyndarus: Helena had destroyed many in the fields of Troy, Clytemnestra one man, but one of such dignity, that he was equivalent to many; the comparison is here continued, that the baleful spirit which breathed through the house of Tantalus, had steeled these royal sisters to deeds of equal daring.

HEATH.

Clytemnestra had said before, that the avenging Fury of Atreus had sacrificed the man for the children; the Chorus here replies, May an avenging Fury arise from the father to vindicate his cause: the words are express, and so understood by Pauw: Mr. Heath explains them by the old Fury of Atreus before mentioned: the μέλας Ἄρης next following is, in the language of Æschylus, the sword, and gives an obscure, but sublime prophecy of the vengeance of Orestes; Mr. Heath renders it, niger discordiæ genius, carrying its rage to such a height, as to strike horror even into him that devoured his own sons: Pauw translates it pruinam et frigus puero voraci, i. e. Oresti, præbebit: the difficulty lies in the word κυροῖρφ, and will not readily be cleared up. Mr. Heath might have spared his ungentlemanlike censures of Pauw, had he recollected that so horrid a design in Orestes as the murder of his mother, must have a natural tendency to *freeze his young blood.*

This vengeance of the Fury? Thus to pride thee
In ruin, and the havoc of thy house,
Becomes thee ill. Ah! 'tis a higher pow'r,
That thus ordains: we see the hand of Jove,
Whose will directs the fate of mortal man.
My king, my royal lord, what words can show
My grief, my reverence for thy princely virtues!
Art thou thus fall'n, caught in a cobweb snare,
By impious murder breathing out thy life?
Art thou thus fall'n, Ah the disloyal bed!
Secretly slaughter'd by a treach'rous hand?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou say'st, and say'st aloud, I did this deed:
Say not that I, that Agamemnon's wife,
Did it: the Fury, fatal to this house,
In vengeance for Thyestes' horrid feast,
Assum'd this form, and with her ancient rage
Hath for the children sacrific'd the man.

CHORUS.

That thou art guiltless of this blood, what proof,
What witness?—From the father, in his cause,
Rise an avenger! Stain'd with the dark streams
Of kindred blood fierce waves the bick'ring sword,
And points the ruthless boy to deeds of horror.—
My king, my royal lord, what words can show
My grief, my reverence for thy princely virtues!
Art thou thus fall'n, caught in a cobweb snare,
By impious murder breathing out thy life?
Art thou thus fall'n, Ah the disloyal bed!
Secretly slaughter'd by a treach'rous hand?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No: of his death far otherwise I deem,
Nothing disloyal. Nor with secret guile

Wrought he his murd'rous mischiefs on this house.
For my sweet flow'ret, opening from his stem,
My Iphigenia, my lamented child,
Whom he unjustly slew, he justly died.
Nor let him glory in the shades below;
For as he taught his sword to thirst for blood,
So by the thirsty sword his blood was shed.

CHORUS.

Perplex'd and troubled in my anxious thought,
Amidst the ruins of this house, despair
Hangs heavy on me. Drop by drop (65) no more
Descends the show'r of blood; but the wild storm
In one red torrent shakes the solid walls;
Whilst vengeance, ranging through the deathful scene,
For further mischief whets her fatal sword.

SEMICHORUS.

Oh Earth, that I had rested in thy bosom,
Ere I had seen him lodg'd with thee, and shrunk
To the brief compass of a silver urn!
Who shall attend the rites of sepulture?
Who shall lament him? Thou, whose hand has shed
Thy husband's blood, wilt thou dare raise the voice
Of mourning o'er him? Thy unhallow'd hand
Renders these honours, should they come from thee,
Unwelcome to his shade. What faithful tongue,
Fond to recount his great and godlike acts,
Shall steep in tears his funeral eulogy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This care concerns not thee: by us he fell,

(65) Stanley translates the words ψακὰς δὲ λήγει, "it ceases to fall drop by "drop:" and so common sense, and the common rules of criticism require that it should be rendered; Mr. Heath translates them by "the storm subsides for a "time;" and thereby destroys the greatness of the conception.

By us he died; and we will bury him
With no domestic grief. But Iphigenia,
His daughter, as is meet, jocund and blithe
Shall meet him on the banks of that sad stream,
The flood of sorrow, and with filial duty
Hang fondling on her father's neck, and kiss him.

CHORUS.

Thus insult treads on insult. Of these things
Hard is it to decide. Th' infected stain
Communicates th' infection; murder calls
For blood; and outrage on th' injurious head,
At Jove's appointed time, draws outrage down.
Thus, by the laws of nature, son succeeds
To sire; and who shall drive him from the house?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

These are the oracles of truth. But hear me;
It likes me to the genius of the race
Of Plisthenes (66) to swear that what is past,
Though poor the satisfaction, bounds my wishes.
Hither he comes no more: no, let him stain
Some other house with gore. For me, some poor,
Some scanty pittance of the goods contents me,
Well satisfied that from this house I've driven
These frantic Furies red with kindred blood.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hail to this joyful day, whose welcome light
Brings vengeance? Now I know that the just gods
Look from their skies, and punish impious mortals,

(66) The relation of Plisthenes to the house of Pelops is not well made out. Hither *he* comes no more, means the genius of the race of Plisthenes.

Seeing this man roll'd in the blood-wove woof,
The tissue of the Furies, grateful sight,
And suffering for his father's fraudful crimes.
Atreus, his father, sovereign of this land,
Brooking no rival in his power, drove out
My father and his brother, poor Thyestes,
A wretched exile: from his country far
He wander'd; but at length return'd, and stood
A suppliant before the household gods,
Secure in their protection that his blood
Should not distain the pavement. This man's father,
The sacrilegious Atreus, with more show
Of courtesy than friendship, spread the feast;
Devoting, such the fair pretence, the day
To hospitality and genial mirth:
Then to my father in that feast serv'd up
The flesh of his own sons: their hands and feet
Hack'd off before, their undistinguish'd parts
He eat, without suspicion eat, a food
Destructive to the race. But when he knew
Th' unhallow'd deed, he rais'd a mournful cry,
And starting up with horror spurn'd to the' ground
The barb'rous banquet, utt'ring many' a curse
Of deepest vengeance on the house of Pelops.
Thus perish all the race of Plisthenes!
And for this cause thou seest him fall'n! His death
With justice I devis'd; for me he chas'd,
The thirteenth son, an infant in my cradle,
With my unhappy father. Nurs'd abroad,
Vengeance led back my steps, and taught my hand
From far to reach him. All this plan of ruin
Was mine, reckless of what ensues; ev'n death
Were glorious, now he lies caught in my vengeance.

CHORUS.

T' imbitter ills with insult, this, Ægisthus,
I praise not. Thou, of thine own free accord,
Hast slain this man; such is thy boast; this plan
Of ruin, which we mourn, is thine alone.
But be thou well assur'd thou shalt not 'scape,
When, rous'd to justice, the avenging people
Shall hurl their stones with curses on thy head.

ÆGISTHUS.

From thee, who labourest at the lowest oar,
This language, and to him that holds the helm!
Thou shalt be taught, old man, what at thy age
Is a hard lesson, prudence. Chains and hunger,
Besides the load of age, have sovereign virtue
To physic the proud heart. Behold this sight (67);
Does it not ope thine eyes? Rest quiet then;
Contend not with the strong; there's danger in it.

CHORUS.

And could thy softer sex, whilst the rough war
Demands its chieftain, violate his bed,
And on his first return contrive his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

No more: this sounds th' alarm to rude complaints.
The voice of Orpheus with its soothing notes
Attracted ev'n the savage; whilst thy yells
To rage inflame the gentle: but take heed;
Dungeons and chains may teach thee moderation.

(67) Behold this sight. The learned Ger. Vossius objects to the conduct of this play, that Agamemnon is killed and buried with such quickness, that the actor had not breathing time given him. It appears from this passage, and several others, that the body yet lay where the murder was committed, and the funeral rites are spoken of as to be performed at some future indefinite time.

CHORUS.

Shalt thou reign king in Argos? Thou, whose soul
Plotted this murder; whilst thy coward hand
Shrunk back, nor dared to execute the deed?

ÆGISTHUS.

Wiles and deceit are female qualities:
The memory of my ancient enmity
Had wak'd suspicion. Master of his treasures,
Be it my next attempt to gain the people:
Whome'er I find unwilling to submit,
Him, like a high-fed and unruly horse
Reluctant to the harness, rigour soon
Shall tame: confinement, and her meagre comrade
Keen hunger, will abate his fiery mettle.

CHORUS.

Did not the baseness of thy coward soul
Unman thee to this murder, that a woman,
Shame to her country and her country's gods,
Must dare the horrid deed? But when Orestes,
Where'er he breathes the vital air, returns,
Good fortune be his guide, shall not his hand
Take a bold vengeance in the death of both?

ÆGISTHUS.

Such since thy thoughts and words, soon shalt thou feel—

CHORUS.

Help, ho! soldiers and friends; the danger's near;
Help, ho! advance in haste with your drawn swords!

ÆGISTHUS.

My sword is drawn: Ægisthus dares to die.

CHORUS.

Prophetic be thy words! We hail the omen (68),

(68) The translator has rendered the word τύχην here by omen, which "in its proper sense signifies futuræ rei signum, quod ex sermone loquentis capitur.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Dearest of men, do not heap ills on ills:
I wish not to exasperate, but to heal.
Misfortune's past: enough is giv'n to vengeance;
Let no more blood be spilt. Go then, old men,
Each to your homes; go, whilst ye may, in peace.
What hath been done the rigour of the times
Compell'd, and hard necessity; the weight
Of these afflictions, grievous as they are,
By too severe a doom falls on our heads.
Disdain not to be taught, though by a woman.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ay; but to hear this vain, tongue-doughty babbler,
Lavish of speech that tempts to desperate deeds,
It moves me from the firmness of my temper.

CHORUS.

An Argive scorns to fawn on guilty greatness.

ÆGISTHUS.

My vengeance shall o'ertake thee at the last.

CHORUS.

Not if just Heav'n shall guide Orestes hither.

ÆGISTHUS.

An exile, I well know, feeds on vain hopes.

CHORUS.

Go on then, gorge with blood; thou hast the means.

ÆGISTHUS.

This folly, be assur'd, shall cost thee dear.

Tully says, lib. i. Divin. Pythagorei non solum voces decorum observarunt, sed etiam hominum, quæ vocant omina. This sort of omen was supposed to depend much upon the will of the person concerned in the event: hence the phrases, 'accepit omen,' 'arripuit omen.' This was its first and proper signification." —Div. Leg.

CHORUS.

The craven, in her presence, rears his crest (69).

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Slight men, regard them not; but let us enter,
Assume our state, and order all things well.

(69) On observing the different characters and qualities of Agamemnon and Ægisthus, these words of old Hamlet readily present themselves as a proper comment on the conduct of Clytemnestra:

> But virtue; as it never will be mov'd,
> Though lewdness court it in the shape of Heav'n;
> So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
> And prey on garbage.

THE CHOEPHORÆ.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ORESTES.
PYLADES.
ELECTRA.
CLYTEMNESTRA.
ÆGISTHUS.
SERVANTS.
CHORUS OF TROJAN DAMES.

THE CHOEPHORÆ.

THE Chorus in the former play, with a dignity and firmness becoming senators of Argos, had expressed their abhorrence of the murder of Agamemnon even to the face of Clytemnestra and Ægisthus, and threatened them with the anger of the gods and the vengeance of Orestes: this is here executed.

The characters of Orestes and Electra are finely supported. A pious resentment of the murder of his father, a consciousness of his own high rank, and a just indignation at the injuries he had received from the murderers, a generous desire to deliver his country from the tyranny of these usurpers, and above all the express command of Apollo, with a promise of his protection if he obeyed, and a denunciation of the severest punishments should he dare to disobey, incited Orestes to this deed: he is accordingly drawn as a man of a brave and daring spirit, touched with the highest sense of honour, and the most religious reverence of the gods:

in such a character there could be nothing savage and ferocious; and we are pleased to find him deeply sensible of the horror of the deed which he was obliged to perpetrate, and averse to plunge his sword into the breast of his mother. "Elec-" tra's character (in the words of the critic) is " that of a fierce and determined, but withal of " a generous and virtuous woman. Her motives " to revenge were, principally, a strong sense of " justice, and superior affection for a father; not " a rooted, unnatural aversion to a mother. She " acted, as appears, not from the perturbation of " a tumultuous revenge, but from a fixed abhor-" rence of wrong, and a virtuous sense of duty." Consistently with this character, when she had given Orestes a spirited account of their father's murder, which drew him to declare his resolution to revenge it, showing at the same time some sign of remorse, she adds a short relation of the barbarous indignities offered to the dead body; a deed of horror which, she knew, would shock his soul. She had seen her father murdered, his body mangled, and buried without its honours; her brother, whom she loved with the tenderest affection, deprived of his throne, and exiled from his country; her mother in the arms of Ægisthus abandoning herself to her loose and infamous pleasures; she was herself continually exposed to the insults and barbarous treatment of this ungentle mother;

what wonder then that a spirit naturally lofty and sensible should catch fire at these injuries, contract a wolfish fierceness, as she expresses it, and urge her brother to sacrifice these proud oppressors to justice and revenge? But the poet, with great regard to decorum, removes her from the scene before the dreadful deed is to be committed: with regard to his management of the catastrophe, nothing could be more judicious. Orestes, who had rushed on Ægisthus with the fury of a tyger, in the presence of his mother feels himself under the restraint of filial reverence, and confesses his reluctance to shed her blood; till Pylades animates him with a sentence as solemn as the Delphic Oracle; which finely marks the fatal blow as an act of necessary justice, not of ruffian violence. Even the Chorus, who enter warmly into the interests of Electra and Orestes, and had fired him to revenge by every argument of duty, justice, law, and honour; who had wished to hear the dying groans of the guilty tyrants, and to echo them back in notes as dismal, after the deed is done, reassume the softer sentiments of humanity, and lament their fate. The remorse and madness of Orestes is touched in the finest manner. These indeed are but sketches, but they are the sketches of a great master: a succeeding poet had the skill to give them their finishing, and heightened them with the warmest glow of colouring. The spirit of Æschylus shines

through this tragedy; but a certain softening of grief hangs over it, and gives it an air of solemn magnificence.

The scene of this tragedy, as of the former, is at Argos before the royal palace. Orestes, according to the custom of ancient times, offering his hair on the tomb of his father, sees a train of females advancing from the house, and *bringing libations to the tomb*; from whence the play receives its name. The action is afterwards removed to the area before the palace. This requires no change of scene.

THE CHOEPHORÆ.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

O THOU, that to the regions of the dead (1)
Bearest thy father's high behests, O hear,

(1) The beginning of this play is lost; but fortunately the sense remains entire. Orestes, returned from banishment, and advancing to the tomb of his father, first implores the protection of Mercury, as the conductor of the dead to the shades below, which was his known office; thus Horace,

Tu pias lætis animas reponis
Sedibus.

Then addresses his father's manes, whilst he places on the tomb his hair before consecrated to the river Inachus; and this in perfect conformity to ancient usage: thus Achilles at the funeral of Patroclus cuts off his hair, sacred to Sperchius: instances abound. As the Grecians wore their hare long, and dressed it with much elegance, we may suppose, that the depriving themselves of so considerable an ornament was an indication of grief; we are led to this by the words of Pindar, Pyth. 4.

Οὐδὲ κομᾶν πλόκαμοι
Κερθέντες οἴχονθ' ἁγλαοὶ.

When Helena, at her return to Argos soon after the death of Clytemnestra, thought it necessary to present her hair at her sister's tomb, she takes care to cut it so as not to disfigure herself; on which Electra says,

O nature, in the bad how great an ill!
But in the virtuous strong thy power to save.
See, she hath shorn th' extremity of her locks,
Anxious of beauty, the same woman still.—EURIP. ELECT.

Hear, Mercury, thy supplicant, protect,
And save me; for I come, from exile come,
Revisiting my country!—Thou, dread shade,
At whose high tomb I bow, shade of my father,
Hear me, O hear! To thee these crisped locks,
Once sacred to the nurture-giving stream
Of Inachus, in th' anguish of my soul
I now devote.—But what are these, this train
Of females in the sable garb of wo
Decently habited? Whence spring their sorrows?
Does some new ruin lord it in the house?
Or haply, if I deem aright, they bring
Oblations to my father's shade, to sooth
The mighty dead. It must be so; for, see,
Electra is among them, my poor sister,
Pre-eminent in grief. Almighty Jove,
O give me to revenge my father's death,
And shield me with thy favour! Pylades,
Stand we apart conceal'd, that I may learn
What leads this train of suppliant females hither.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

This sadly-pensive train to lead,
With hallow'd rites to sooth the dead,
To bear these off'rings to his shrine,
The melancholy task is mine.
And, as from yon proud walls I take my way,
My cheeks, with many' a sounding blow
Beat by these hands, in crimson glow,
Whilst my poor heart to anguish sinks a prey:
And the fair texture of this vest,
That decent o'er my swelling bosom roll'd,

My griefs through ev'ry waving fold
Have rent, and bared my bleeding breast.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

For in the still and midnight hour,
When Darkness aids his hideous pow'r,
Affright, that breathes his vengeance deep,
Haunts with wild dreams the troubled sleep,
That freeze the blood, and raise the bristling hair:
Grim spectre! he with horrid tread
Stalk'd around the curtain'd bed,
And rais'd a yell that pierc'd the tortur'd ear.
Aghast the heav'n-taught prophet stood;
The dead, he cries, the angry dead around
These dreadful notes of vengeance sound,
Dreadful to those that shed their blood.

STROPHE 2.

With soul-subduing fear appall'd
Me this unholy woman call'd,
To bear these gifts, this train to lead,
And sooth to peace the mighty dead.
But will these gifts be grateful to his shade?
O Earth, when once the gushing blood
Hath on thy purple bosom flow'd,
What grateful expiation shall be made?
Ill-fated house, thy master slain,
How are thy glories vanish'd! O'er thy walls
A joyless, sunless darkness falls,
And Horror holds his hateful reign.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Round him the blaze of greatness shone,
And dignity adorn'd his throne:
The people bow'd before their lord,
Awe-struck, and his high state ador'd.

Where now that reverend awe, that sacred dread
Of majesty? Success, to thee,
As to a god, men bend the knee.
But justice hastes t' avenge each impious deed;
Some in day's clear and open light,
Some in the dusky evening's twilight shade
Or by delay more furious made,
Some in the dreary gloom of night.

EPODE.

His blood, that sunk upon the ground
A stiffen'd mass of carnage lies,
Aloud for vengeance on his murderers cries:
Ate obeys thy call; but slow
Delays, till dreary night enclose them round,
Prepar'd to strike a deeper blow.
Shall he, that foul with midnight rape
Pollutes the nuptial bed, escape?
Murder and lust! Were all the streams, that wind
Their mazy progress to the main,
To cleanse this odious stain in one combin'd,
The streams combin'd would flow in vain.
Me, from my bleeding country torn,
Condemn'd the servile yoke to bear,
Bitter constraint and spirit-sinking fear
Compel t' obey their proud commands;
Just, or unjust, perforce they must be borne;
Captive, my life is in their hands:
Perforce my struggling soul conceals its hate;
My vest forbids the starting tear to flow;
Mourning the mighty chief's unhappy fate
Silent I stand, and stiffen with my wo.

ELECTRA.

Ye captive females, to whose care this house

Owes what it has of order, since with me
You here are present on these suppliant rites
Attendant, show, instruct me, as I pour
These solemn off'rings on the tomb, what words
Of gracious potency shall I pronounce?
Or how invoke my father? Shall I say
" To her lov'd lord the loving wife hath sent
" These presents?" Shame forbids: nor hath my tongue
Aught of address, whilst on my father's tomb
I offer these atonements. Should I rather,
As nature prompts, entreat him to return
Like garlands to the senders, meet reward
For their ill deeds? Or with inglorious silence,
For so he perish'd, on the thirsty earth
Pour these libations, then retire, like one
That in some worthless vessel throws away
Something unclean, and casts the vessel with it,
Nor backwards turns her eyes. Instruct me, friends,
Advise me, for alike we hate this house;
Be open then; here you have none to fear.
The free escapes not fate, more than the wretch
That trembles at his proud lord's tyrannous hand.
If thou hast aught of counsel, give it me.

CHORUS.

Since, as some hallow'd shrine, thy father's tomb
I reverence, at thy bidding I will speak.

ELECTRA.

I charge thee, by that reverence, freely speak.

CHORUS.

With these libations pour thy ardent vows
For blessings on the head of all his friends.

ELECTRA.

Whom by that honour'd title shall I name?

CHORUS.

Thyself the first, and all that hate Ægisthus.

ELECTRA.

For thee and me then shall I pour these vows?

CHORUS.

To learn and weigh this well, be thy concern.

ELECTRA.

Whom to this friendly number shall I add?

CHORUS.

Though distant far, remember poor Orestes.

ELECTRA.

That's well: I learn no little wisdom from thee.

CHORUS.

Remember next the authors of his death.

ELECTRA.

What should I say? Instruct my lack of knowledge.

CHORUS.

Pray that some god, or man, may come to them.

ELECTRA.

With what intent? To judge, or to avenge?

CHORUS.

Speak plainly, to repay them death for death.

ELECTRA.

And may this be with reverence to the gods?

CHORUS.

What hinders to requite a foe with ill?

ELECTRA *at the tomb.*

O thou, that to the realms beneath the earth
Guidest the dead, be present, Mercury,
And tell me that the pow'rs, whose solemn sway
Extends o'er those dark regions, hear my vows;
Tell me that o'er my father's house they roll

Their awful eyes, and o'er this earth, that bears
And fosters all, rich in their various fruits.
And thee, my father, pouring from this vase
Libations to thy shade, on thee I call,
O pity me, pity my dear Orestes,
That in this seat of kings our hands may hold
The golden reins of pow'r: for now oppress'd,
And harass'd by a mother's cruel hand,
Who for Ægisthus, that contriv'd thy death,
Exchang'd her royal lord, he wanders far,
And I am treated as a slave: Orestes
From his possessions exil'd, they with pride
Wantonly revel in the wealth thy toils
Procur'd: O grant Orestes may return,
And fortune be his guide: Hear me, my father,
And grant me, more than e'er my mother knew,
The grace and blush of unstain'd modesty (2),
And a more holy hand! For us these vows;
But on our foes may thy avenger rise
Demanding blood for blood. These vows I breathe
In dreadful imprecations on their heads.
Be thou to us, my father, with the gods,
This earth, and pow'rful justice, be to us,
That breathe this vital air, a guide to good.
With these libations such the vows I offer.

(2) The Chorus, as more experienced through their age, had instructed Electra how to address the shade of her father, to pour her first vows for blessings on herself and her friends, and particularly to remember Orestes. As he was dearest to her heart, she soon forgets herself; and her warmest vows are for his happy return; then, recurring to what particularly concerns herself, she prays, not for a restoration to her princely rank, but for the virtues becoming her sex, that she may be much more modest than her mother, and her hand more holy. Propriety of character is one of the great excellencies of Æschylus, of which this is a very delicate instance.

Now let your sorrows flow: attune the Pæan,
And sooth his shade with solemn harmony.

CHORUS.

Swell the warbling voice of wo,
Loudly let the measures flow;
And ever and anon the sorrowing tear
Trickling dew the hallow'd ground,
T' avert the ills we fear;
Whilst on this sepulchral mound
Her pious hands the pure libation shed,
T' atone the mighty dead.
Hear me, O hear me, awful lord,
Through the dreary gloom ador'd!
Ha! Who is this (3)? See, sisters, see,
Mark with what force he shakes his angry lance:
Comes he this ruin'd house to free?
So does some Thracian chief advance;
So Mars, when rous'd with war's alarms,
Radiant all his clashing arms,
Rears high his flaming falchion to the blow,
And thunders on the foe.

ELECTRA.

'Tis finish'd; these libations to my father
The earth has drunk.—Thou awful pow'r, that holdest
'Twixt this ethereal sky and the dark realms

(3) The Chorus begins this Pæan to the dead with lamentations for their lost lord; they are proceeding to invoke his aid; but this is scarce mentioned, when they break off with outcries, the prophetic rapture seizes them, and impresses on the imagination the youthful hero in all his radiant arms coming to avenge the death of his father. This is the sublime and daring spirit which distinguishes Æschylus from all other writers. It makes one blush to point out this to the reader; but Mr. Heath has rendered it necessary, who by understanding this optative not interrogative (as he expresses himself), hath annihilated the beauty and grandeur of the image.

Beneath dread intercourse, What may this mean?
'Tis all amazement. Share this wonder with me.

CHORUS.

Say what: my throbbing heart has caught th' alarm.

ELECTRA.

Plac'd on the tomb behold these crisped locks.

CHORUS.

Shorn from a man, or some high-bosom'd dame?

ELECTRA.

'Tis no hard task to form a strong conjecture.

CHORUS.

Young though thou art, inform my riper age.

ELECTRA.

None here, myself excepted, could devote
His locks, the mournful off'ring ill becomes
Our enemies. Then the colour; mark it well;
'Tis the same shade.

CHORUS.

With whose; I burn to know.

ELECTRA.

With mine: compare them: are they not much like?

CHORUS.

Are they a secret off'ring from Orestes?

ELECTRA.

Mark: they are very like his clust'ring locks.

CHORUS.

I marvel how he dared to venture hither.

ELECTRA.

Perchance he sent this honour to his father.

CHORUS.

Nor that less cause of sorrow, if his foot
Must never press his native soil again.

ELECTRA.

A flood of grief o'erwhelms me, and my heart
Is pierc'd with anguish (4); from my eyes that view
These locks, fast fall the ceaseless-streaming tears,
Like wintry show'rs. To whom besides, that here
Inhabits, could I think these locks belong?
Could she, who slew him, offer on his tomb
Her hair? Alas! her thoughts are impious all,
Such as a daughter dares not name. I deem,
With reason then I deem they graced the head
Of my Orestes, dearest of mankind:
Why should not I indulge the flatt'ring hope?
Ah! had they but a voice, could they but speak
That I no more might fluctuate with these doubts
Perplex'd and troubled; could they plainly tell me
If they were shorn from a foe's hated head,
Or fondly mix their kindred griefs with mine,
A grace and honour to my father's tomb!
But to the gods, that know what furious storms
Burst o'er me, like a shipwreck'd mariner,
I make appeal: if haply aught of safety
Remains, from this small root the vig'rous trunk
May spread its shelt'ring branches.—Further mark
Th' impression of these feet (5); they show that two

(4) Much good wit hath been thrown away upon this passage, which might well have been spared, had the design of the poet been attended to. No discovery is from hence raised; but the mind of Electra is deeply struck; she reasons, and conjectures, and so is finely prepared for the discovery which soon follows. Aristotle has mentioned this, but in his dryest manner; yet it is plain, that he understood it thus, for he has drawn up the reasoning of Electra into a syllogism in form. But envy and buffoonery are perverse qualities.

(5) Hoc δεύτερον τεκμήριον plane rediculum est: Et mirum, quod eruditissimus comicus id non perfuderit aceto suo: Sentiunt omnes, qui aliquid sentiunt.

PAUW.

Pudet hæc opprobria nobis
Aut dici potuisse, aut non potuisse refelli.

Trod here; himself perchance and his attendant;
One of th' exact dimensions with my own.
But all is anguish and perplexity.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORESTES.

In other pressures beg the fav'ring gods
To hear thy vows, and show'r their blessings on thee.

ELECTRA.

What blessing from them have I now obtain'd?

ORESTES.

Thou seest before thee whom but late thine eyes
Most wish'd to see.

ELECTRA.

And dost thou know the name,
Which with fond joy my tongue delights to utter?

ORESTES.

Thy fervent vows, I know, are for Orestes.

ELECTRA.

And of those vows what have I yet obtain'd?

ORESTES.

I am Orestes: seek no firmer friend.

ELECTRA.

With wily trains thou wouldst ensnare me, stranger.

ORESTES.

Then should I spread these trains against myself.

ELECTRA.

But thou wouldst mock me in my miseries.

ORESTES.

To mock thy miseries were t' insult my own.

ELECTRA.

Am I indeed conversing with Orestes?

ORESTES.

Thou seest me present, yet art slow to know me.
When offer'd on the tomb thou saw'st these locks,
When with thy own th' impressions of my feet
Were measur'd, joy gave wings to expectation,
And imag'd me before thee. Mark these locks,
Shorn from thy brother's head; observe them well,
Compare them with thy own. This tissue, view it,
The texture is thy own, the rich embroidery (6),
Thine are these figures, by thy curious hand
Imag'd in gold.—Let not thy joy transport thee:
Our nearest friends are now our deadliest foes.

ELECTRA.

Thou dearest pledge of this imperial house,
From thee my hopes, water'd with tears, arose:
Thy valour shall support our righteous cause,
And vindicate the glories of thy father.
Pride of my soul, for my fond tongue must speak,
The love my father shared, my mother shared,
Once shared, but justly now my soul abhors her,
And that poor victim my unhappy sister,

(6) The ladies, in the simplicity of ancient times, valued themselves much, and indeed were highly esteemed for their skill in embroidery: these rich wrought vests made great part of the wealth of noble houses: Andromache, Helen, and Penelope were celebrated for their fine work, of which Minerva herself was the patroness; and Dido was as excellent as the best of them. As they could not but know what their own hands had wrought, nothing could bring them clearer conviction than a sight of their own curious labours. Orestes was nearly arrived to manhood, when he left, or was driven from Argos; it must therefore be extreme malice, or rival jealousy, which could give this passage so ridiculous a turn as to suppose, that Orestes now wore a vest made for him in his infancy; besides, the word ὕφασμα, as Stanley candidly observes, is a general term; and the reader is left at his liberty to understand by it a belt, or any other piece of embroidery: certainly it was not the vestment of Orestes, for he returned in the habit of a peasant; and it concerned him greatly, that no part of his dress should discover him to Clytemnestra.

Is center'd all in thee: thou art my father,
My mother, sister, my support, my glory,
My only aid: and heav'n's great King shall prosper
Thy courage, and the justice of thy cause.

ORESTES.

Look down, great King of Heav'n, look down, behold
These deeds of baseness; see an orphan race,
Reft of the parent eagle (7), that, inwreath'd
In the dire serpent's spiry volumes, perish'd.
They, unprotected, feel th' oppressive pangs
Of famine, yet too weak to wing their flight,
And, like their parent, fill their nest with prey.
We are the eagle's offspring, of our father
Depriv'd, and driv'n in exile from his house.

(7) A great poet gives every image, every circumstance a peculiar propriety: this does not arise here merely from the allusion to the eagle, which, as the imperial bird, finely characterizes the royal Agamemnon; but it here acquires new grace from what the naturalists have told us of the enmity of the eagle to the serpent-race, and their frequent battles, some of which ended fatally to the generous bird, as here: Virgil has given us a fine description of one of these battles, wherein the eagle is conqueror;

Utque volans alte raptum cum fulva draconem
Fert aquila, implicuitque pĕdes, atque unguibus hæsit:
Saucius at serpens sinuosa volumina versat,
Arrectisque horret squamis, et sibilat ore
Arduus insurgens: illa haud minus urget obunco
Luctantem rostro, simul æthera verberat alis.—Æn. xi. v. 751.

As when th' imperial eagle soars on high,
And bears some speckled serpent through the sky;
While her sharp talons gripe the bleeding prey,
In many a fold her curling volumes play;
Her starting brazen scales with horror rise,
The sanguine flames flash dreadful from her eyes:
She writhes, and hisses at her foe, in vain,
Who wings at ease the wide aërial plain;
With her strong hooky beak the captive plies,
And bears the struggling prey, triumphant, through the skies.

PITT.

Before thy altars, loaded by his hand,
He bow'd with pious reverence: Should thy will
Permit his young to perish, who shall pay thee
Like costly honours? Should the eagle's offspring
Be doom'd to perish, who shall bear thy thunders,
Dread sign of wrath awak'd on mortal man?
Nor will this empire, wither'd from its roots,
Adorn thy altars on the solemn day
With hallow'd victims. Save us then, protect us,
To all its former glories raise this house,
Whose ruin'd tow'rs seem bending to their fall.

CHORUS.

Ye generous offspring of this royal house,
And guardians of its honour, check your transports;
Lest they are heard, and some incontinent tongue
Bear them to our bad rulers: may these eyes
First see the dark wreaths of their funeral piles.

ORESTES.

The voice of Phœbus never shall deceive:
In dreadful accents utter'd from his shrine
Aloud he charg'd me to defy the danger,
Threat'ning to rack my soul with keenest tortures,
Should I forbear t' avenge my father's death
With equal retribution on his murderer,
That proudly riots in my wasted wealth.
This honour'd shade he charg'd me to avenge,
Though round enclos'd with evils; to the dead
This triumph o'er their foes the voice declar'd
A lenient joy; to us denouncing ills,
Corrosive leprosies with rankling tooth
To gnaw our flesh, and taint our healthful bodies
With ulcerous foulness, changing these fresh locks
T' untimely white; with trains of heavier woes

Rais'd by the Furies from my father's blood,
Who in the realms of night sees this, and bends
His gloomy brows. For the dark shafts, that fly
From those beneath slain by the kindred hand
Of villain baseness, phrensy, and vain fear
That trembles at the shadows of the night,
Rouse, sting, and drive the vice-polluted wretch
With brazen scourges tortur'd through the city.
He from the friendly bowl, the hallow'd goblet (8),
The social intercourse, the incens'd altar
Is chas'd, condemn'd to bear the secret pangs
Of inly-gnawing guilt: meanwhile the fiends,
Hatred and Infamy, pursue his steps,
And drag him to an execrable death.
Such was the voice of Phœbus, and demands
My prompt obedience. Could my soul refuse
T' obey the awful mandate, yet the deed
Must be accomplish'd; many urgencies
Conspire; the charges of the gods, the grief
That wounds me for my father, the fierce pangs
Of penury compel me (9); and the shame,

(8) Æschylus here in brief describes the miserable state of the unexpiated murderer, his interdiction from every altar, every table, and every house; no one holding converse or intercourse with him as polluted and abominable.—Stanley. This indeed was usually the punishment inflicted by the state; but the poet here finely ascribes it to the vengeance of the Furies.

(9) Mr. Heath, who hath given us a specimen of his critical acumen on the former part of this speech, observes here, that Orestes cannot be supposed to reckon his own penury among the causes that incite him to revenge his father's death; but his princely generosity was affected at the poverty of those illustrious conquerors who had overturned Troy.—It must indeed have hurt his generous mind to see such men enslaved by a woman, and an effeminate man; this the poet with great judgement observes, but he no where says that their new tyrants had touched the soldiers' spoils: he makes Ægisthus say, that he was master of

That burns the generous soul, to leave my country,
And all those heroes glorious through the world,
Whose conquering arms laid Troy's proud tow'rs in dust,
Slaves to two women; for his soul is woman:
If not, th' occasion soon will prove his spirit.

CHORUS.

And you, tremendous Destinies, whose pow'r
Is ratified by Jove, mark the firm course
Of justice, and by that direct th' event.
Be th' insults of the hostile tongue repaid
With hostile insults: Justice calls aloud,
Demanding vengeance: let the murd'rous blow,
Requite the murd'rous blow. The solemn voice,
Requiring that oppressive force should feel
Oppressive force, is sanctified by age.

ORESTES.

O thou much injur'd shade, my suffering father,
In thy dear cause what shall I say, what do,
Guided by fortune hither? Where, O where
Is thy couch spread? Our light is shaded o'er
With darkness deep as thine; our youthful graces,
That in this royal house once bloom'd with hope
Fair opening, shrink at the rough blast of sorrow.

Agamemnon's treasures; and Electra, in her first address to her father's shade, with much indignation says to him:

Orestes,
From his possessions exil'd, they with pride
Wantonly revel in the wealth thy toils
Procured.

And indeed it might be some aggravation to the misfortunes even of a brave prince, to see the shameless usurpers of his possessions wasting his wealth in riot, whilst he was compelled to seek a miserable and precarious subsistence from the charity of others.

CHORUS.

No: the devouring flames, my son, that waste
The body of the dead, touch not the soul;
That lives, and knows its destin'd hour to show
Its wrath: yet for the dead our sorrows rise.
Meanwhile th' oppressor stands a signal mark;
And the just griefs of fathers and of sons
With restless search trace all around for vengeance.

ELECTRA.

Hear me too, O my father; in those griefs
Which at thy sepulchre thy children pour,
I have a mournful part. Thy tomb receives
Alike the suppliant and the exile. Which,
Ah, which of these is well? Which without evils?
No lenient hand can ease our miseries.

CHORUS.

Yet may the god, that utter'd from the shrine
His awful voice, from these raise other sounds
More pleasing; and for these sepulchral notes,
Notes steep'd in tears, through all these royal rooms
The voice of joy may ring, and hail their lord
Return'd to bless them with his kind protection.

ELECTRA.

Yet, O my father, hadst thou greatly fallen
Beneath the walls of Troy, pierc'd by the spear
Of some bold Lycian, leaving to thy house
Thy glory, gracing with illustrious splendour
Thy children's steps, on that barbaric coast
The high-rais'd tomb had dignified thy dust,
And sooth'd our sorrows. In the realms beneath,
Thy friendly shade, amongst the friendly shades
That fell with honour there, had held its state
Majestic and rever'd, a king, next those

Whose awful pow'r those darksome realms obey.
For to thy last of life thou wast a king,
The golden reins of empire graced thy hands,
And thy strong sceptre ruled a willing people.
But in the fields of Troy thou didst not fall,
Nor is thy tomb beside Scamander's stream
With those that perish'd by the hostile spear.
But, oh! I wish that they, by whom he fell,
Had first so fall'n; and he, though distant far,
Had heard the rumour of their bloody fate,
Secure himself, nor tangled in their snares.

CHORUS.

Treasures of gold, my child, are poor to this:
Thy words are greater than the greatest fortune,
And all her favours: from thy grief they spring (10).
But from this scourge a double clash is heard (11);
One from th' assistant pow'rs beneath the earth;
One from those lords, those hated lords that rule us,
Whose rude, unhallow'd hands are stain'd with blood:
This sounds most dreadful to this royal race.

ELECTRA.

This, like a piercing arrow, wounds my soul.

CHORUS.

Supreme of gods, send from the realms of night
The slow-avenging Ate; bid her rise
To blast the fraudful and audacious hands

(10) The grief, which Electra expressed for the murder of her father, flowed from a generous and noble spirit: her resentment must therefore be generous and noble.

(11) This grief is compared to the scourge of the Furies, from whence a double clash is heard; one given by the shade of Agamemnon, ready to assist their revenge; the other by the murderers, which was most to be feared, because their unhallowed hands were prompt to deeds of violence.

Of impious mortals; for a father's wrongs
She stamps her vengeance deep. When on this man
The vengeful sword shall fall, and bleeding nigh
Lies this bad woman, be it mine to hear
Their shrieks of death, and answer to their cries
In notes as dismal. Why should I conceal
My honest hopes? Fate spreads her sable wings,
And hovers o'er their heads; before their eyes
Stands Indignation arm'd, and Hate enrag'd,
Ready to rend their hearts, when Jove shall stretch
His puissant hands. O thou, whose pow'r subdues
The mighty, to this country seal thy faith,
And ratify their doom! On th' impious heads
I ask for vengeance. You, whose dreaded pow'r
Th' infernal realms revere, ye Furies, hear me!
There is a law that, for each drop of blood
Shed on the earth, demands that blood be shed;
For, from the slain, Erinnys calls for slaughter,
On ruin heaping ruin. Ye dread pow'rs
Of Hell's dark realms, where are you now? Behold,
Ye potent curses of the slain, behold
The poor remains of this imperial house
Sunk in distress, and all its glories vanish'd!
Where King of Heav'n, where may we seek for refuge?

ELECTRA.

Again my throbbing heart sinks at the sound
Of thy laments; and dark'ning o'er my soul
At thy sad voice comes anguish and despair.
But when thy words breathe courage, my sick griefs
Are fled, and fairer fortune seems to smile.
But with what words to woo her? Speak aloud
The miseries which we suffer from our parents?
Or smooth our tongues to glozing courtesy?

That softens not our miseries: and our spirits,
Rous'd by the wrongs of our ungentle mother,
Contract a wolfish fierceness. With bold hand
She struck the stroke (12), bold as the Cissian dame
Train'd to the warrior's arms. She struck him once;
Again she struck him; her uplifted hands
Redoubled blow on blow; swift on his head
The distant-sounding strokes with steep force fell:
Bold unrelenting woman, that could bear
Without one pitying sigh t' entomb the king
Unhonour'd with his people's grief, the husband
Without a tear to grace his obsequies.

ORESTES.

All thou hast mentioned are indignities
That swell my grief to rage. But vengeance arms
This hand, assisted by the gods, to punish
Th' ignominious wrongs done to my father.

(12) Mr. Heath acutely observes, that the true sense of this passage hath escaped the sagacity of all the interpreters, who have been led into their error by uniformly taking it as referring to the murder of Agamemnon; whereas, in truth, it relates solely to poor Electra, whose ears had been soundly boxed by her mother; and the words are to be rendered thus, "She struck a martial stroke "(meaning the first box on the ear she gave her daughter, as the signal of "battle), then might you see many cuffs often repeated, her hand twisted in my "hair, after the manner of a Cissian female warrior."—Spirit of Pauw, be this an atonement for all the insults heaped upon thee!

The design of Electra here is to excite her brother to avenge the murder of their father; and we shall perceive, that this is finely carried on. Upon the accidental mention of "fairer fortune," she says, how shall we obtain it? by speaking our griefs aloud, or by flattering our mother? but they admit no softening, nor can we ever think of her with any degree of tenderness: she struck the bloody stroke, she repeated it on his unhappy head with all the fierceness of a Cissian virago; then she buried him without his honours.

Orestes answers precisely to this, that vengeance, by the assistance of the gods, and by his hand, would inflict punishment for this wrong done to his father; but as he shows himself affected at the revenge to be executed, Electra proceeds to give him an account of the indignities offered to the dead body.

May this revenge be mine, then let me die!

ELECTRA.

When she had kill'd, with barbarous hands she mangled(13)
His manly figure, and with this abuse
Entomb'd him here, studious to make his murder
A deed of horror, that through all thy life
Might shock thy soul. Such was thy father's death,
Such were thy father's ignominious wrongs.
But me, a poor, deserted, worthless thing (14),
Spurn'd like a mischievous cur from my apartments,
They bid begone: there I could heave the sigh
In secret, there indulge the mournful pleasure
To pour the tear unnotic'd, and uncheck'd.
Hear this, and on thy mind imprint it deep,
Engrave it on the tablet of thy heart;
Be resolute, and calm. These things are thus:
Know this, and let thine indignation rise:
The time demands a firm, determin'd spirit.
And thou, my father, hear: on thee I call,

(13) To mangle a dead body was more horrid than the act of murder itself, as it made the manes of the deceased a dishonourable spectacle among the shades below, where they were thought to retain these disfiguring mutilations, and were of course disabled from any acts of vengeance. Plato built a fanciful philosophy on this opinion, of which Virgil knew how to make the true poetic use, when he describes Eriphyle pointing to the wound of her son,

Mæstamque Eriphylen
Crudelis nati monstrantem vulnera cernit.

The figure of Deiphobus is represented under the same idea.

(14) Electra, having given a relation of the injuries and dishonours done to her father, now proceeds to the ill treatment which she had herself received. Virgins had an honourable apartment in the house assigned them, the chaste reserve of ancient manners requiring this separation from the familiarity, and even the eyes of men: Electra was not admitted to this, but like a mischievous cur turned into the court, and contemptuously neglected: this was the utmost indignity.

And with a friendly voice, though chok'd with tears,
Hear us, and aid!

CHORUS.

And with a friendly voice this social train
To her sad voice accords the strain.
Hear, mighty shade, and from the realms of night
Revisit this ethereal light;
Against thy foes impart thy aid,
Be war with war, and blood with blood repaid;
Ye gods, with justice strike the blow!
I tremble as the measures flow;
But Fate attends, and hears our call.
And, stern the bloody forfeit to demand,
With fury arms the kindred hand,
And bids the righteous Vengeance fall.
Here Sorrow holds her dismal state,
Unsated Murder stains the ground,
Revenge behind and Terror wait,
And Desolation stalks his round;
Not with a distant foe the war to wage,
But on this house to pour their rage.
These are the strains, that to the gods below,
Th' avenging gods, in rude notes flow:
Hear us, dread powers; and this imperial race,
Victorious in your might, with glory grace!

ORESTES.

My royal father, who unroyally
Wast murder'd, give me to command thy house!

ELECTRA.

Hear me, my father, for I want thy aid;
Grant me to share his vengeance on Ægisthus,
And then escape; so may the solemn feast
Be spread to thee; else when the grateful odours

Are wafted from the festive board, to grace.
The mighty dead, thy shade must want its honours.
To thee this hand shall bring the costliest off'rings,
To thee shall consecrate whate'er of wealth
Ought, from thy treasures, to adorn my nuptials (15);
And with the holiest reverence grace thy tomb.

ORESTES.

Earth, send my father to behold the combat!

ELECTRA.

Inspire him, Proserpine, with glorious force!

ORESTES.

Think on the bath where thou wast murder'd, father!

ELECTRA.

Think on the net in which they murder'd thee!

ORESTES.

Toils, other than of brass, entangle thee.

ELECTRA.

Th' inexplicable robe's accurs'd contrivance.

ORESTES.

My father, cannot these dishonours raise thee?

ELECTRA.

Dost thou not raise thy honour'd head? O send
Justice to aid thy friends: or if thy soul
Sinks with its wrongs, nor rises to avenge them,
Be the like sufferings ours! But, O my father,
Hear our last cries, and sitting on thy tomb
Behold thy children: pity my weak sex,

(15) Affection to her father peculiarly marks the character of Electra, of which she could not give a stronger instance than this. Deprived as she now was of all her share of her father's riches, she had it not in her power to offer any presents at his tomb; but should Ægisthus be slain, she devotes even her nuptial dowry to that purpose.

Pity his manly sorrow, nor extinguish
Th' illustrious line of Pelops: so in death
Thou dost not die; for children, when the tomb
Demands the parent, with surviving glory
Preserve his fame; the corks that buoy the line,
And save the net from sinking to the bottom.
O hear us; for thy sake we pour these plaints.
Thou shalt preserve thy glory, if with honour
Thou hear our words, our blameless words, that honour
The fortune of thy tomb, else unlamented!—
Now, brother, since thy soul is rous'd to dare
This deed, trust on the god, and do it straight.

ORESTES.

I shall: but let me pause awhile to ask
Wherefore she sent these off'rings, on what motive
Thus late she sooths th' immedicable ill,
Paying his wretched honour to the dead
That cares not for it. What these presents mean
Surpasses my conjecture, but her crime
Outweighs their worth; for all, that can be offer'd
T' atone for one man's blood, is spent in vain.
Yet, if you know, explain her motives to me.

CHORUS.

I know, for I was present: dreams and visions,
The terrors of the night, appall'd her soul;
Her guilty fears urg'd her to send these off'rings.

ORESTES.

Told she the dreams, that so alarm'd her fears?

CHORUS.

She fancied she had giv'n a dragon birth.

ORESTES.

And what was the event? Tell me in brief.

CHORUS.

This new-born dragon, like an infant child,
Laid in the cradle seem'd in want of food;
And in her dream she held it to her breast.

ORESTES.

Without a wound 'scaped she the hideous monster?

CHORUS.

The milk he drew was mix'd with clotted blood.

ORESTES.

'Tis not for nought this vision from her husband.

CHORUS.

She cry'd out in her sleep with the affright;
And many lamps, dim-gleaming the darkness,
To do her pleasure enter'd the apartment.
Soon to the tomb she sends these funeral honours,
Medicinal, as she hopes, to heal her ills.

ORESTES.

But to this earth, and to my father's tomb
I make my supplications, that in me
Her dream may be accomplish'd; and I judge
It aptly corresponds: for as this serpent,
Leaving the place that once was mine, and laid
Swath'd like an infant, seiz'd that breast which nurs'd
My tender age, and mingled with the milk
Drew clotted blood; and as with the affright
She call'd out in her sleep; it cannot be
But as she nurs'd this monster, she must die
A violent death (16); and with a dragon's rage

(16) Orestes shows throughout some marks of tenderness for his mother, and a reluctance to shed her blood. When Electra had urged him to do the deed instantly, he pauses a while to ask for what cause Clytemnestra had sent these oblations to the tomb; being told that she was affrighted with portentous dreams, he particularly inquires what they were. The vision is finely and strongly con-

This hand shall kill her, as her dream declares.
Or how wilt thou expound these prodigies?

CHORUS.

Thus may it be. But now instruct thy friends
What each must singly do, and each not do.

ORESTES.

Few words suffice: then mark me: Let HER enter;
And keep, I charge thee, keep my purpose secret:
That they, who slew an honourable man
By curs'd deceit, may by deceit be caught
In the same snare, and perish; so the god,
Powerful Apollo, from whose sacred voice
Nothing but truth can flow, admonish'd me.
I, like a stranger, harness'd in this coarse
And way-worn garb, with Pylades my friend,
Will as a guest and friend knock at the gate:
Our tongues shall imitate the rustic accent
Familiar to the mountain-race of Phocis (17).
Nor will the servants, 'tis a villanous house,

ceived: he takes it as a prodigy sent from the gods to confirm his resolution; he catches fire from it, and declares

She must die
A violent death: and with a dragon's rage
This hand shall kill her.

The spirit and beauty of the original is inimitable,

Δεῖ τοινῦν, ὡς ἔθρεχεν ἐκπαγλον τέρας,
Θανεῖν ζιαίως: ἐνδρακοντωθεὶς δ' ἐγὼ
Κτενῶ νιν.

(17) Clytemnestra had told Agamemnon that Strophius king of Phocæa had taken Orestes under his protection from any dangers or disturbances that might arise in the state: the young prince had indeed the good fortune to escape from his mother, and was hospitably received at Phocis, from whence he now returned in disguise, attended by Pylades the son of Strophius, whose friendship was so faithful to Orestes in all his distresses, that it became proverbial.

Receive us cheerfully; but as we are,
There shall we stand; while each that passes by,
With shrewd remarks shall shake his head, and say,
Why are these strangers thus inhospitably
Excluded from the gates, if their arrival
Ægisthus knows 'midst his domestic train?
But if I pass the threshold of the gates,
And find him seated on my father's throne,
Or should he come t' accost me, be assur'd
Quick as the eye can glance, ere he can say
Whence is this stranger? my impatient sword
Shall strike him dead. So shall the fell Erinnys,
That with a horrid joy riots in slaughter,
Quaff this third bowl of blood.—Go then, Electra,
Be watchful; see that all things in the house
Be well dispos'd. And you, I charge you guard
Your tongues; be silent where you ought, and where
Your voice can aid me, speak. The rest my friend,
That guides my sword to vengeance, will o'ersee.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Pregnant with ills the dreary air
Gives sickness, pain, and terror birth:
The seas that wind around the earth,
Fatal to man their hideous monsters bear:
Each forest in its shaggy sides,
That darkens o'er the perilous ground,
The lurking, rav'nous savage hides,
Whilst fierce birds wheel the summits round:
And mark with what tempestuous rage
Black from the skies the rushing winds engage.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

But who the dangerous thoughts can tell
That in man's daring bosom roll;
Or whirl the more tempestuous soul
Of woman, when the tyrant passions swell?
When love, to torment near allied,
Bids phrensy rule the troubled hour?
Love, that exerts with wanton pride
O'er female hearts despotic power;
And binds in his ungentle chain
Each savage of the wood, each monster of the main.

STROPHE 2.

Think with what sullen phrensy fir'd
The Thestian dame with ruthless hand (18):
Cast on the hearth the fatal brand;
The flames consum'd it, and her son expir'd.
With horror think on Scylla's deed (19):
To win the favour of the foes,
The golden bracelets were the meed,
Against her father's life she rose,

(18) When Althea, the daughter of Thestius, was delivered of Meleager, the Destinies attended at her labour; and, upon the birth of the child, throwing a log on the fire as they spun his thread of life, pronounced this charm. "O new-"born child, we assign the same period of existence to this log and to thee:" then vanished. Althea snatched the log from the flames, and preserved it with great care, till Meleager having slain her two brothers, for rudely taking the head of the Calydonian boar from Atalanta, to whom he had presented it, this unnatural mother threw the fatal brand into the fire, and the charm of the destinies was fulfilled. This story is told by Ovid, Met. l. 8.

(19) This story is also told by Ovid, ibid. Minos, the celebrated king of Crete, was besieging Alcathoe, where Nisus reigned, on whose head grew a lock of purple hair, on which the safety of the city depended. Scylla, the daughter of Nisus, in love with the Cretan king, as Ovid relates it, or bribed by some female gewgaws according to Æschylus, entered her father's apartment as he lay sleep, and cut off this charmed lock. The city was immediately taken.

Approach'd the sleeping monarch's bed,
And reft the sacred honours of his head.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Amongst these deeds of blood, that stain
The annals of the times of old,
Be that unhallow'd couch enroll'd,
Whose guilty loves this royal house profane.
Enroll'd be all that female hate
Form'd 'gainst the chief in arms renown'd;
The chief, whose glorious, awful state
Foes 'midst their rage with reverence own'd:
Those glories, though they blaze no more,
Quench'd by a woman's hand I still adore.

EPODE.

In the black annals of far distant time
The Lesbian dames recorded stand (20);
But the soul shudders at the crime,
And execrates the murders of their hand:
Basely at once the husbands bleed;
Th' indignant gods abhor the deed.
And shall man dare with impious voice t' approve
Deeds, that offend the powers above?
Through the gored breast
With rage imprest
The sword of justice hews the dreadful wound;
And haughty might
That mocks at right,
Like the vile dust is trampled on the ground.

(20) This is a very tragical tale. All the men of Lemnos that were able to bear arms, had invaded Thrace, and continued the war three years: their wives, stung with rage and jealousy, formed a horrid design, which they executed the very night on which their husbands returned, to murder every male on the island. Hypsipyle alone saved her father Thoas. Statius has related the whole transaction with his usual spirit.—Theb. v. l. 70.

Righteous are thy decrees, eternal king,
And from the roots of justice spring:
These shall strike deep, and flourish wide,
Whilst all, that scorn them, perish in their pride.
Fate the portentous sword prepares,
And the rough labours of the anvil shares;
Wide through the house a tide of blood
Flows where a former tide had flow'd;
Erinnys marks the destin'd hour,
Vengeful her meditated rage to pour.

ORESTES.

What, does no servant hear me knock? Within
Who waits? Again I knock: Does no one hear?
A third time to the servants of this house
I call, if to the stranger at his gate
The great Ægisthus bears a courteous soul.

SERVANT.

Forbear, I hear. Who art thou, and from whence?

ORESTES.

Go tell the lords of this fair house, to them
I come, charg'd with strange tidings: haste;
For now the sable chariot of the night
Rolls on apace; and the dark hour exhorts
The way-spent traveller to repose beneath
The hospitable roof. Call forth the matron,
That has the charge of these domestic cares;
More decent, if a man; for modesty
There checks the falt'ring tongue, but to a man
More confident a man speaks free and open.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak, strangers, what your wants (21); here shall you find
All that becomes a house like this; warm baths,
Refreshment of your toils, the well-spread couch
Inviting soft repose, and over all
An eye regarding justice. If your business
Be of more serious import, asking counsel,
The province this of men; we will inform them.

ORESTES.

A Phocian am I, from the town of Daulis (22),
Occasions of my own call'd me to Argos,
Nor ask'd a better dress, than this coarse garb
Familiar to me: onwards as I travell'd
I met a man unknown, myself to him
Unknown; he courteous question'd me how far
I journey'd, and inform'd me of my way,
Strophius of Phocis, so I chanc'd to learn;
Stranger, says he, since business of thy own
Leads thee to Argos, let me chargē thy honour
To tell his parents that the young Orestes
Is dead. Forget it not. Whether his friends
With solemn obsequies will fetch him hence,

(21) Hospitality was so highly regarded, that it was amongst the most honourable of the labours of their greatest heroes to punish those who offered insults to strangers: so that it was not beneath the dignity of Clytemnestra in person to invite these travellers into her house; she even takes a pride in recounting the magnificence with which they should be entertained.

(22) This speech conceals the greatest art under an apparent simplicity; Orestes appears as a rustic Phocian, and unacquainted with the person of the king; of course he must be supposed to be a stranger to the transactions of that court, and the real history of Orestes; this prevents suspicion: the same affected simplicity and innocence is preserved in his next speech.

Or in eternal rest our friendly earth
Shall lay him in her hospitable bosom,
Bring back their pleasure; for the brazen urn
Now holds the ashes of the honour'd youth,
Whom we lament. This, faithful to my charge,
Have I deliver'd; if to kindred ears,
And those, whose power is sovereign here, I know not.
But it is meet his parent knew th' event.

ELECTRA.

Ah me! Thus desolation on our head (23)
Is fall'n. O thou relentless curse, whose rage
Hung o'er this house, has thy unsparing eye
Mark'd what we lodg'd at distance, aiming there
Thy cruel shafts, to rob me of my friends?
Ev'n now Orestes, who with cautious tread
Had from this gulf of ruin freed his foot,
Ev'n he, the hope medicinal to the madness
Of this ill house, shows that our hope betrays us.

ORESTES.

It were my wish to have borne other tidings,
More welcome to the lords of this fair mansion,
And meriting their hospitable favours:
For what more strongly to benevolence
Can bind the grateful soul? Yet I should deem it
An impious wrong not to disclose ev'n these,

(23) Electra's affection for her brother induces her to attend Clytemnestra: on hearing the feigned account of his death, she breaks into a formal exclamation on the curse of Thyestes, proper enough as she was circumstanced; but what nature would not have dictated had her grief been real: she cautiously avoids asking the strangers any question, and even leads the queen from making inquiries, by expressing a fondness for her brother, and throwing out a severe reflection, which she had reason to think would give great offence, and so shorten the conversation.

Unwelcome, as they must be, to his friends,
So solemnly intrusted to my charge.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not less for this shalt thou receive such usage
As thy worth challenges: not less for this
Respected here: another would have come
Charg'd with the same sad message. But the hour
Demands refreshment for the stranger, spent
With the long travel of the weary day.
Lead him to those apartments, where the men
Are well receiv'd; let his attendant follow,
His fellow traveller; let thy diligent care,
I charge thee, minister to all his wants.
We to the rulers of this house will bear
These tidings, and amongst our friends consult
What measures in this sad event to form.

CHORUS, *alone.*

Now, my dear partners, slaves to this proud house,
Now let us show our fortitude, now teach
Our tongues a noble daring for Orestes.

Thou hallow'd earth, thou hallow'd mound,
Whose high sepulchral round
Lies on the royal chief, that o'er the main
To glory led his martial train,
Now hear us, now impart your aid:
On this important hour,
Persuasion, try thy fraudful power:
And thou, through night's surrounding shade,
Come, Mercury, from the shades below,
And when the falchion flames, direct th' avenging blow!

SERVANT, GILISSA, CHORUS.

SERVANT.

This stranger, it should seem, brings mournful tidings;
I see the tear steal from Gilissa's eye,
Nurse of Orestes. Wherefore dost thou pass
These doors? The sorrows, that attend thy steps,
Shall here find no reward: expect it not.

GILISSA.

My royal mistress order'd me with speed
To call Ægisthus to these stranger guests;
That man from man he with more certainty
Might learn this fresh report. Before the servants
She kept her smile beneath a mournful eye,
To hide her joy at this event; to her
A joy indeed, but to this house a tale
Of deep affliction. He too, when he hears
The narrative, will from his soul rejoice.
Ah me! what sorrows in successive train
Have in this house of Atreus pierc'd my soul
From ancient times: but never have I suffer'd
A loss like this: with patience other ills,
Well as I might, I bore. But my Orestes
Was the dear object of my anxious thoughts;
An infant I receiv'd him from his mother;
I nurs'd him, many' a night to all his wants,
To all his cries attentive, with a care
That now avails me not: e'er reason dawns,
The nurse's care is needful; in his cradle
The infant knows not to express his wants,
Rise they from thirst, or hunger, or the calls
Of nature: with fond diligence I mark'd
Th' instinctive cry, nor with a squeamish niceness

Thought scorn of any office; for my love
Made all delightful. Now, unhappy me!
My dear Orestes is, I hear, no more.
But I am sent in haste to that vile man,
Whose rank pollution stains this noble house:
With pleasure this report will he receive.

CHORUS.

With what appointment does she bid him come?

GILISSA.

Appointment! Let me comprehend thy meaning.

CHORUS.

If with his train of guards, or unattended.

GILISSA.

She bids him come attended with his guards.

CHORUS.

No, tell him not (24), this hated lord; but wear
A face of cheerfulness; and urge him hither

(24) Orestes had enjoined the Chorus to be silent where they ought, and to speak where their voice might aid him: they had kept themselves near the tomb till they saw him enter the palace; they then advance with an intention of assisting his cause, as occasions should arise: Gilissa soon gave them a very favourable one, which they readily embrace, by conjuring that faithful servant to call forth Ægisthus alone without his guards, which facilitated the enterprise of Orestes; to induce her to this, they were obliged to give her hopes of some favourable event; but though they knew her fidelity, they could not be enough assured of her prudence to trust her with the important secret: had they told her that the person, who appeared under the character of a messenger, had brought tidings that would give her joy, they had discovered too much; they prudently therefore refer her to the power of Jupiter, who might redress these evils: How? replies the nurse; Orestes, our hope, is dead: the answer of the Chorus is so ambiguous, that she could not possibly comprehend it in its full meaning, yet clear enough to induce her to ask whether they had heard any thing that contradicted the report: not to answer this plain question in the negative, was to leave her mind under the impression of hope, and with this she is ordered to carry her message, and leave the event to the gods: this required some management, and it is finely conducted. A criticism of Mr. Heath has given occasion to this long note.

Alone, devoid of fear, to be inform'd.
For the mind catches from the messenger
A secret elevation, and bold swell.

GILISSA.

This news, it seems, is welcome to thy soul.

CHORUS.

But what if Heav'n's high King redress these ills?

GILISSA.

How? With Orestes all our hopes are dead.

CHORUS.

Not all. This needs no prophet to unfold it.

GILISSA.

Hast thou heard aught disproving this report?

CHORUS.

Go, bear thy message; do as thou art order'd:
The gods, whose care this is, will guide th' event.

GILISSA.

I go, in all observant of thy precepts.
May what is best come from the fav'ring gods!

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Now my righteous pray'r approve,
Father and King of gods, Olympian Jove!
To thee may I unfold
Such vows, as from the modest and the wise
In the cause of Justice rise.
O, may these eyes behold
Her pow'r, ador'd by all, maintain
The glories of her awful reign!
Hear me, monarch of the sky,
Protect him with thy guardian care;

O'er his foes exalt him high,
That lord it in the regal chair!
His ruin'd honours thus restor'd,
With fiercer rage thy vengeance shall be pour'd.

ANTISTROPHE.

Yok'd to Affliction's iron car
This orphan son of a lov'd father spare:
Restrain its headlong force;
And let the rapid wheels, with many' a bound
Rolling o'er the rugged ground,
Here stop their painful course.
And you that guard this royal seat,
Its blazing wealth, its gorgeous state,
Hear, propitious gods, and save!
Let not the blood of former slain
Fresh returns of vengeance crave;
No more these crimson'd mansions stain:
Slaughter no more from slaughter rise,
If low beneath the righteous sword he lies!

MONOSTROPHE.

Thou, that hast fix'd thy dreary reign (25)
Deep in the yawning gulf below,
Yet let him rise, yet view this scene,
Around his gloomy eye-balls throw,

(25) Stanley has marked the sense of this passage so precisely, that one is surprised to see it afterwards mistaken, but Pauw has said *μέγα ναίων στόμιον* est orcus: *δὸς ἀνδρὰ*, i. e. Agamemnonem: ejus umbra rediret domum ut filio adesset. Mr. Heath, who always hath a prurience to quarrel with Pauw quo jure, quâve injuriâ, has discovered that *μέγα ναίων στόμιον* respicit Apollinem speluncam Delphis insidentem, *ἀνδρὰ* Orestem. We allow the critic his authorities, that *στόμιον* is sometimes used to express the cave at Delphos; but we cannot give up the passage cited by Stanley from Pindar. Had Apollo been here intended, we certainly should have heard something of the *μαντεύματα τὰ πυθόχρηστα*. But, says the critic, Agamemnon was dead, nothing remained of him but his ashes and his shade, præter cineres et umbram tenuem, therefore it could not be

Distinct and clear the vengeance mark,
That threatens from her covert dark!
Thou, son of Maia, come, and with thee lead
Success, that crowns the daring deed:
To form the close and dark design,
Whether th' ambiguous tale thou lov'st to weave,
And throw around the veil of night;
Or bid'st ev'n truth itself deceive,
Display'd in all the dazzling blaze of light;
The powers of secrecy are thine.
Then shall this pensive female train
These rich oblations pay no more;
No more the melancholy strain,
Tuned to the voice of anguish, pour.
Raptur'd their triumph shall I see,
My friends from ruffian danger free.
And thou, when thy stern part is come, be bold;
Think how in blood thy father roll'd:
And when, "my son, my son," she cries,
To melt thy manly mind with plaintive moan,
Then to her guilty soul recall
Thy murder'd father's dying groan;
And to his angry vengeance let her fall:
Like Perseus turn thy ruthless eyes (26);
Just to thy friends above, thy friends below,

said of him, that he beheld his house ἐλευθερίως, καὶ λαμπρῶς, καὶ φιλιόις ὄμμασι, but this is said in defiance of Æschylus and all antiquity. Could this learned person have forgot that Darius, who also was ashes and a shade, was addressed as a mighty and magnificent power, δαίμονα μεγαλαυχῆ? Could he have forgot that Orestes had evoked his father to behold the combat; and that Electra had implored Proserpine to give him a glorious force, εὔμορφον κράτος?

(26) The mention of Perseus here obliquely insinuates, that Clytemnestra was as dangerous and dreadful as Medusa, on whom Perseus could not look when he slew her.

Aim with applauded rage the destin'd wound;
Great in thy vengeance rush upon the foe,
And strike the murd'rer bleeding to the ground.

ÆGISTHUS, GILISSA, CHORUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

This message has a voice, that calls me forth
To learn with more assurance this report,
By certain strangers brought, touching the death
Of young Orestes; most unwelcome this;
And the relation to this house will add
Fresh terror to the fear, whose unheal'd wound
Smarts inwardly, and rankles. Should I give
Full credit to this tale, or rather deem it
The idle offspring of these women's fears,
That lightly rose, and will as lightly die?
Tell me, what proof gives credit to this rumour?

GILISSA.

Indeed we heard it: but go in, examine
These strangers; less regard is due to rumour,
Than to clear information learnt from them.

ÆGISTHUS.

I wish to see this stranger, and to ask him
If he himself was present at his death,
Or only speaks from an obscure report.
Deception finds no easy entrance here.

CHORUS.

What should I say, eternal King,
Or how begin the strain?
These passions how contain,
That in my throbbing breast tumultuous spring?
O that, in aid, my daring deed
Might all the force of words exceed!

For now distain'd with blood the bick'ring sword
The contest ends; if all
This royal race shall fall;
Or the just laws their ancient state resuming,
And Liberty her light reluming,
Hail to his father's rights the son restor'd.
'Gainst two fierce wolves the youth contesting stands (27)
Alone: may Heav'n-sent conquest grace his hands!

ÆGISTHUS, *within.*

Oh! I am slain.

CHORUS.

That groan! Again that groan!
Whence? What is done? Who rules the storm within!
The deed is finish'd: let us keep aloof,
And seem unconscious of these ills: best stand
At distance, whilst destruction ends her work.

SERVANT.

Wo, wo to me! Wo to my slaughter'd lord!
Wo on my wretched head, and wo again!
Ægisthus is no more. But open here,
Ye females, instantly unbar these doors;
Th' occasion calls for vigour, not t' assist
The slain. Ho, here! What call I to the deaf?
Or sleep you? Where is Clytemnestra? How
Employ'd? Her life stands at the sword's bare point,
And ready vengeance seems to prompt the blow.

CLYTEMNESTRA, SERVANT, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What means thy clamour? Whence these shrieks of wo?

(27) The translator readily and thankfully embraces Mr. Heath's fine conjecture here, who for θεῖος proposes to read θῶσιν.

SERVANT.

They, that were rumour'd dead, have slain the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me! I understand thee, though thy words
Are dark; and we shall perish in the toils,
Ev'n as we spread them. Give me instantly
The slaught'ring axe; it shall be seen if yet
We know the way to conquer, or are conquer'd:
These daring measures have my wrongs enforc'd.

ORESTES, PYLADES, CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

ORESTES.

Thee too I seek. He has his righteous meed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me! my dear Ægisthus, thou art dead.

ORESTES.

And dost thou love the man? In the same tomb
Shalt thou be laid, nor ev'n in death forsake him.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, stay thy hand, my son: my child, my child,
Revere this breast, on which thou oft hast slept (28),
And oft thy infant lips have press'd its milk.

ORESTES.

What shall I do, my Pylades? Restrain'd
By filial reverence, dread to kill my mother?

(28) Orestes afterwards in his own vindication pleads thus to the father of Clytemnestra:

> Should wives with ruffian boldness kill their husbands,
> Then fly for refuge to their sons, and think,
> Baring their breasts, to captivate their pity,
> These deeds would pass for trivial, as their mood,
> For something or for nothing, shall incline them.
>
> EURIP. ELECT.

PYLADES.

Where then the other oracles of Phœbus,
Giv'n from the Pythian shrine? The faithful vows,
The solemn adjurations, whither vanish'd?
Deem all the world thy foes, save the just gods.

ORESTES.

Thou hast convinc'd me; thy reproofs are just.—
Follow him: on his body will I slay thee.
Alive thou held'st him dearer than my father;
Then sleep with him in death, since thou couldst love him,
And hate the man who most deserv'd thy love.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I nurs'd thy youth, and wish to tend thy age.

ORESTES.

What, shall my father's murd'rer dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The Fates, my son, the Fates decreed his death.

ORESTES.

And the same Fates decree that thou shalt die.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Dost thou not dread a mother's curse, my son?

ORESTES.

That mother cast me out to want and misery.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so; I sent thee to a friendly house.

ORESTES.

Though nobly born, a slave, and doubly sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What in exchange, what price did I receive?

ORESTES.

I blush to charge thee with the guilty price.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Blush not; but with it name thy father's lightness.

ORESTES.

Sitting in wanton ease, blame not his toils.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Barr'd from our husbands, irksome are our hours.

ORESTES.

Yet in your ease your husbands' toils support you.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My son, my son, thou wilt not kill thy mother!

ORESTES.

Thy hand, not mine, is guilty of thy death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Take heed; avoid a mother's angry Furies.

ORESTES.

Relaxing here, how shall I 'scape my father's?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Methinks while yet alive before my tomb
I pour the funeral strain, that nought avails me.

ORESTES.

Nought: for my father's fate ordains thy death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me! I gave this dragon birth, I nurs'd him:
These terrors of the night were more than phantoms.

ORESTES.

Foul and unnatural was thy murd'rous deed:
Foul and unnatural be thy punishment.

CHORUS, *alone.*

The double ruin ev'n of these awakes
Our grief. But since his cruel fate has plung'd
Orestes deep in blood, pour we the pray'r
That his fair day set not in endless night.

STROPHE.

Revenge at length is come, though slow her pace,
For Priam's ruin'd race.

In Agamemnon's royal hall,
Rous'd by the Pythian god's inspiring call,
The glorious exile stands;
With lion port, with martial mien,
Such as the god of war is seen,
The sword of justice light'ning in his hands,
Fir'd by the prompting voice divine,
That thunder'd from the shrine,
Dauntless he dar'd these dang'rous courts to tread.
Hark! 'tis his voice: the walls around
His cheerful shouts resound:
No more the tyrants' malice shall he dread;
The tyrants' lavish hands no more
Shall waste his treasur'd store;
No more their pride usurp his throne,
Low in the dust their hostile pride o'erthrown.

ANTISTROPHE.

With dark and secret fraud HIS coward mind
The bloody deed design'd.
Revenge, with solemn steps and slow
Advancing, meditates the secret blow;
Daughter of Heav'n's high Lord,
Though by the name of Justice known
Her sovereign power weak mortals own,
She guides his hand, she points his thund'ring sword;
And rushing with impetuous might
Assists him in the fight,
Breathing destructive fury on his foes.
Nor less 'gainst HER whose treach'rous hand
This injur'd house profan'd,
From his deep shrine with fury Phœbus glows.
For ev'n the gods with sacred awe
Revere this righteous law,

THE FURIES.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

THE PYTHIAN PRIESTESS.

APOLLO.

MINERVA.

THE GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

ORESTES.

CHORUS, THE FURIES.

THE FURIES.

It is pleasant enough to observe with what heat the critics rise against this tragedy. C'est si bizarre.—L'unité de lieu n'est pas gardée dans cette pièce: mais ce n'est pas-là qui choque le plus.—Tota œconomia dramatis impia est et inepta.—Hic uno momento tota scenæ facies mutatur, et pro Delphis ac templo Apollinis Delphici habemus Athenas et templum Minervæ Athenis. Nihil ineptius aut inconcinnius excogitari posset. —The poet, it seems, had dared to violate the unities; and further has introduced personages of so extravagant a character as to baffle the skill of these literary martinets, and to whip them from their foining fence; hinc illæ lachrymæ. Æschylus in all his other pieces that remain to us, has paid the strictest attention to these favourite unities; and with reason; he was their father, and knew their merit as well as any man: even here, where his management of the subject led him to treat them with less respect, he has softened the viola-

tion by a kind of magic power: Apollo and the Furies must be allowed the liberty to transport themselves whither and when they please: and Mercury has the charge of conducting Orestes; so that had Horace wrote,

> Ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur
> Ire poëta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
> Inritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet
> Ut magus; et modo me DELPHIS, modo ponit Athenis,

the allusion would have added a wonderful propriety to the expression, and the lines have conveyed a just character of this tragedy. However a French or a Dutch critic may be shocked at this change of scene, to an Athenian nothing could be more agreeable than to see a contest, which Apollo could not compose at Delphos, brought before the great council of his own city, the god in person attending and pleading in the cause. That respect to his country, which distinguishes our noble poet above all the writers of antiquity, has an irresistible charm. "Rules, "art, decorum, all fall before it. It goes directly "to the heart, and gains all purposes at once." The English reader feels this in its full force, and Æschylus is acquitted of the charge of having violated a unity.—As these dreadful sisters were the ministers of the offended gods, to execute their vengeance on impious mortals stained with blood,

just, impartial, and of resistless power, they were held in the highest reverence: as they were cruel, implacable, and delighted with their terrible office, they were detested, and abhorred by gods and men: this accounts for the very different treatment they here meet with. For the rest, let P. Brumoy be the poet's advocate. "On sent assez "que les traits rude et un peu grossiers de cette "pièce sont fort opposés à notre goût, et au vray "goût du théâtre. Mais il ne faut pas confondre "parmi ces traits, ce qui regarde uniquement les "mœurs et les idées des Grecs. Le ronflement "des Furies, et ce spectacle des monstres dif-"formes, ne vaut du tout rien. Cependant, comme "c'etoient des Divinités respectable pour les "Grecs, ils les voyoient avec d'autre yeux que "nous. A plus forte raison devoient-ils être "moins choqués de voir Apollon plaider pour "Oreste, et Minerve jouer le rôle qu'elle joue. "Tout cela étoit dans leur genie; et il est néces-"saire qu'on s'en rapproche autant qu'il est pos-"sible, pour ne pas trouver ridicule une tragédie "qui ne l'étoit certainement pas au goût du peu-"ple LE PLUS POLI DE L'UNIVERS."

Had these critics explained the motives which induced this venerable court to acquit Orestes, from the laws and usages of ancient times, they would have been better employed: but not a word of this. This curious inquiry was reserved for a

writer of a very different genius; and the reader will thank me for referring him to the notes on the Epistle to the Pisos, v. 127.

This foul sisterhood on the Athenian stage amounted to fifty: the consternation arising from their hideous figures, and gestures, and yellings, had such fatal effects upon the children et les femmes enceintes, that the state by an express law reduced the number of the Chorus to fifteen, and afterwards to twelve. But the translator dares assure the English ladies, for whom he has too great a respect to offer them any thing that can have the least tendency to hurt them, that they may read this play with the utmost safety. These ancient virgins are, to be sure, at first a little wayward, and rather outrageous; but they soften by degrees, till they become perfectly good-humoured, and the best company in the world. He flatters himself that he needs not make any apology for passing so slightly over ces ronflements redoublés des Furies, which are marked with great exactness in the original; nor for an omission of somewhat a similar nature in the last scene of the PERSIANS. He has taken the liberty to change the position of a few lines, where the Furies quit the temple of Apollo: which to him appeared necessary.

THE FURIES.

Scene, the Vestibule of the Temple of the Pythian Apollo.

THE PRIESTESS.

WITH reverence first to th' Earth I pray these vows,
The first prophetic pow'r: to Themis next,
Who next her mother held, they say, this seat
Oracular: Titanian Phœbe then,
She too the daughter of the Earth, unforc'd
Assum'd this seat; to Phœbus at his birth
Rich gifts (1), in honour of the day, she brought,

(1) The custom of making presents at the birth of a child is of high antiquity: a passage from the Phormio of Terence is alleged to prove, that the eighth day after the birth, on which the name was given, was esteemed the dies natalis, and that the presents were then offered; but that passage clearly proves, that these gifts were presented on each day,

Porro autem Geta
Ferietur alio munere ubi hera pepererit,
Porro alio autem ubi erit puero natalis dies.

At the birth only some female relations attended as assistants to Lucina, and these came not empty-handed; on the other, the parents entertained their friends at a feast, the sacra repotia patrum, and the guests were liberal in their presents to the mother: in this sense probably we are to understand Homer, who says, that Delos upon the birth of Apollo was loaded with gold,

χρυσῷ, δ' ἄρα Δῆλος ἅπασα
Βεβρίθει, καθορῶσα Διὸς Λητῦς τε γενέθλην.

Hym. in Apollo, v. 135.

And grac'd him with her name; the Delian rock,
The lake he left, and anchor'd in the port
Sacred to Pallas: thence to this fair region,
And high Parnassus, held his solemn march:
Attendant on his state the sons of Vulcan (2)
With reverend awe prepare his way, and tame
The rude and savage earth; the joyful people
Hail his arrival, and the sceptred Delphus,
Lord of this realm, ador'd the passing god:
With his own sacred skill high Jove inspir'd
His raptur'd soul, and placed him on his throne,
The fourth prophetic god, whence now he gives
His father's oracles: to these I raise
My first-breath'd vows. Nor less Pronæan Pallas (3)
Demands her meed of praise. Next I adore
The nymphs, that in Corycia's cavern'd rocks (4),
Lov'd haunt of soaring birds, in rustic state

(2) By the sons of Vulcan the Scholiast understands the Athenians, and tells us, that Theseus cleared the way of robbers: for which he is justly reproved by Pauw; for how came the Athenians to be sons of Vulcan? he then recommends it to us to look in some dark corner, if haply something may there lie hid which may give light to this passage. Apollo found the country around Parnassus rocky and barren,

Οὔτε τρυγηφορός, ἦδεν' ἐπήρατος, οὔτ' εὐλείμων,
Ὡς τ' ἀπό τ' εὖ ζώειν καὶ ἄμ, ἀνθρώποισιν ὀπηδεῖν.
Hym. in Apoll. v. 529.

To cultivate this country, and to introduce the arts of polished life, was a work worthy of Apollo, and we find that it was soon done: as Vulcan was the god of fire, "which lends its aid to every art," the workmen in the finer arts may properly be called his sons. Probably no deeper mystery lies here concealed.

(3) It appears from Callimachus and Pausanias, that Minerva had a shrine before the temple at Delphos: hence her title Pronaia.—STANLEY.

(4) The poet could not with propriety omit the mention of this remarkable cave in the Delphian rock: it was sacred to Pan and the Corycian Nymphs, the daughters of the river Plistus.—STANLEY.

Have fix'd their residence; though Bacchus claims (5)
The rude domain: my memory now recalls
With what a port he led his raging nymphs
To havoc, when devoted Pentheus fled
Affrighted, as a hare before his hunters.
The fountains next of Plistus, and the pow'r
Of Neptune I invoke (6): and lastly thee,
Supreme, all-perfect Jove! These rites perform'd,
As priestess of the Shrine I reassume
My sacred seat. Frequented as of old
Be this oracular fane; and may the gods
Grant me auspicious answers: if from Greece
Th' inquirers, pleas'd return they with the Fates!
But my voice utters, what the god inspires.

[She enters the Temple and returns affrighted.

Things horrible to tell, and horrible
To sight, have forc'd me from the fane again:
Trembling with fear my lax limbs ill support
My frame, save that my hands with eager grasp
Uphold my sinking weakness as I pass.
As to the shrine with many' a garland crown'd
I bend my age-enfeebled steps, beneath
The central dome I see a man abhorr'd
By the just gods, a suppliant it should seem,
For such his posture; but his hands are stain'd
With blood; in one he holds a new-drawn sword,
High in the other crown'd with ample wreaths
An olive branch, with wreaths of snowy wool

(5) This shows, that the country was now cultivated. The story of Pentheus is the subject of the Bacchæ of Euripides.

(6) Neptune is here invoked, as having formerly been the lord of this country, till he exchanged it for Calauria.—Scholiast.

Handsomely wrought: thus far I speak assur'd.
Before him lies a troop of hideous women
Stretch'd on the seats, and sleeping; yet not women,
But Gorgons rather, nor the Gorgon form
Exactly representing, as I have seen them
Drawn by the painter's imitative pencil,
Snatching the viands from the board of Phineus (7).
These have not wings; but cloth'd in sable stoles,
Abhorr'd and execrable; as they sleep
Hoarse in their hollow throats their harsh breath rattles,
And their gall'd eyes a rheumy gore distil.
Ill suit such loathsome weeds the hallow'd fane
Grac'd with the forms of sculptur'd gods, ill suit
The roofs of men: so foul a sisterhood
Till now I never saw; no land can boast
To have produc'd a breed so horrible,
But toils, and groans, and mischiefs must ensue.
But here Apollo reigns; his awful power
Guards his own fane, auspicious to disclose
The dark decrees of Fate, to spread the glow
Of vig'rous health, to breath th' ambrosial gales
And chase from other mansions all that hurts.

The Temple opens.—APOLLO is seen.—ORESTES as a suppliant.—The FURIES in a deep sleep.

APOLLO.

No: I will not forsake thee: to the end
My guardian care shall favour and assist thee

(7) Phineus was king of Pæonia: being old and blind, and having lost his sons, his daughters, Pyria and Erasia, wasted his wealth in wanton riot: hence the fable, that the Harpies snatched the viands from his table.—PALÆPHATUS.—It is observable, that the ancients in general and particularly the elegant Athenians, most commonly represented the vices under the most disgustful forms, and gave the personified virtues the most beautiful and amiable figures.

Present, or distant far: but to thy foes
I know not mercy. See this griesly troop,
Sleep has oppress'd them, and their baffled rage
Shall fail, grim-visag'd hags, grown old
In loath'd virginity: nor God, nor man
Approach'd their bed, nor savage of the wilds;
For they were born for mischiefs, and their haunts
In dreary darkness 'midst the yawning gulfs
Of Tartarus beneath, by men abhorr'd,
And by th' Olympian gods. Fly then, nor yield
To weak distrust: they, be thou sure, will follow
With unremitting chase thy flying steps
Wide wand'ring o'er the firm terrene, and o'er
The humid sea, and wave-surrounded towns.
But faint thou not, sink not beneath thy toils;
Fly to the city of Minerva, take
Thy suppliant seat, with reverence in thy arms
Grasp her time-honour'd image. Holding there
Concordant counsels, lenient of these ills,
We shall not want the means to heal thy pains,
And ratify thy peace: for at my bidding
Thy sword is purple with thy mother's blood.

ORESTES.

'Tis not unknown to thee, royal Apollo,
That I have done no deed of base injustice:
This known, forsake not, slight not my just cause:
Strong is thy power, and faithful to defend.

APOLLO.

Remember: let not fear unman thy mind.
And thou, my brother, by our ties of blood,
Our common parent, I adjure thee, Mercury,
Protect him: rightly if the name of guide
Be thine, be thou his guide; defend my suppliant;

For Jove with reverence looks on mortal man,
That awfully reveres our guiding pow'r.

To the Furies sleeping.

THE GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

What, can you sleep? Is this a time t' indulge (8)
Your indolent repose? Through your neglect
I am dishonour'd 'mongst the dead, revil'd,
For that I slew him with incessant taunts,
And wander with disgrace: this infamy,
I tell you, is through you: my horrid suff'rings,
From those most dear to me, excite no anger
Of one offended god; yet I was slain
By my son's hand. With thy mind's eye behold
These wounds (9): in sleep the vig'rous soul, set free
From gross corporeal sense, with keener view
Looks through the fate of mortals, dimly seen

(8) To add to the horror of the scene, the ghost of Clytemnestra appears. She retains in death the same fierce and implacable spirit which she possessed alive; here indeed, from the religious principles of the times, she had reason to be anxious for the punishment of Orestes, as without that revenge her shade could not appear with any dignity in the regions below; the death of Hector, and the insults on his body turn on this principle; even the tender and pathetic Virgil puts this sentiment into the mouth of the afflicted Evander.—Æneid. xi.

Go, friends, this message to your lord relate;
Tell him, that if I bear my bitter fate,
And after Pallas' death live ling'ring on,
'Tis to behold his vengeance for my son.
I stay for Turnus; whose devoted head
Is owing to the living and the dead:
My son and I expect it from his hand;
'Tis all that he can give, or we demand.
Joy is no more: but I would gladly go,
To greet my Pallas with such news below.—DRYDEN.

Accordingly the death of Turnus is a sacrifice to the manes of Pallas,

Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas
Immolat, et pœnam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.

(9) An ill-grounded dogma of the Pythagorean philosophy worse applied.

Through the day's troubled beam. Oft have ye tasted
My temp'rate off'rings mix'd with fragrant honey (10),
Grateful libations: oft the hallow'd feast
Around my hearth, at midnight's solemn hour,
When not a god shar'd in your rites: but this,
All this I see disparag'd now, and scorn'd;
And he is fled, light as the bounding roe,
Burst from your nets, with many' a bitter scoff.
Hear me, O hear! 'tis for my soul's repose
I plead: rouse your keen sense, infernal powers,
'Tis Clytemnestra calls you in your dreams.
Deep is your sleep; meanwhile he distant flies:
I ask your aid; else not a suppliant comes
To interrupt your rest: supine you lie
In dead repose, nor pity my afflictions;
Meanwhile Orestes flies: shall he escape,
The murd'rer of his mother? Sound thy sleep,
And loud thy deep-drawn breath. Hast thou e'er done
Aught, but fell deeds of mischief? Rouse, awake:
The terrors of the dragon lose their force,
Quench'd in the dark profound of toil and sleep.

CHORUS, *asleep.*

Seize him there, seize him, seize him, take good heed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

In dreams dost thou pursue him, like the hound
That opens in his sleep, on th' eager chase
Ev'n then intent. And is this all? Awake,
Arise: let not thy toil subdue thee; know
What loss ensues if sleep enfeebles thee;

(10) No wine was ever used in the libations to the Furies, therefore called ὑφάλιοι σπονδαί. These private and midnight rites to the Furies strongly mark the character of Clytemnestra.

And let these just reproaches sting thy mind,
Incentives to the wise: with fiery breath,
That snuffs the scent of blood, pursue this son,
Follow him, blast him in the prosp'rous chase.

CHORUS, *awaking.*

Awake, arise: rouse her as I rouse thee.
Yet dost thou sleep? Leave thy repose; arise:
Look we if this firm guard hath been in vain.

Ha, sisters, ha! 'tis base, 'tis foul;
Vain is our labour, vain our care:
This insult stings my tortur'd soul,
Untaught contempt and wrong to bear.
Whilst overpower'd with sleep I lay,
Burst from the net escapes the prey.

Great triumph, treach'rous son of Jove,
In youth's fresh prime to mock my age!
Thee could this impious suppliant move
(And thou a god) whose cruel rage
Plung'd in his mother's breast his sword?
Yet thou hast screen'd the wretch abhorr'd.

Clashing her scourge with hideous sound
Reproach upon my slumbers stole;
Deep in my heart impress'd the wound,
Ev'n yet chill horror shakes my soul.
These are the deeds in misrule's hour
When youthful gods usurp the pow'r.

See all defil'd with gore thy throne,
There sate the murd'rer dropping blood.

Yet these pollutions are thy own;
From thee the call, the impulse flow'd:
Such grace, despis'd th' age-honour'd Fates (11),
Your new unhallow'd shrines awaits.

And shall this wretch in safety breathe,
Screen'd by thy power severe to me;
No: let him fly the earth beneath,
Never, he never shall be free:
No: as he dared this murd'rous deed,
Murder shall fall upon his head (12).

APOLLO.

Hence, I command you, from my hallow'd seat
Be gone with speed; quit this oracular shrine:
This is no place to snatch your winged serpents,
And hurl them from your golden-twisted string,
To wing the black blood from the human heart
With torture, then disgorge your horrid feast
Of clotted gore: such guests my house abhors.

(11) Mr. Heath inclines to think, that respect is here had to Themis, whom Apollo drove by force from the Delphic shrine: this learned person had forgot that Phœbe succeeded to Themis without any violence, θελούσης, οὐδὲ πρὸς ἐιαντινὸς, and resigned in favour of Apollo. He has scarce hinted his opinion, but he wavers in it; and from what the Furies afterwards say, that Apollo had crushed the ancient power of the Fates, by deceiving them in the house of Pheres, is induced to believe, that the poet alludes to some fabulous tradition, which is lost in the lapse of time. But surely all this perplexity might have been avoided, had this learned person recollected, that the Furies say of themselves, that Fate at their birth had assigned them this office, to pursue the murderer with vengeance till he dies: Apollo therefore, by rescuing Orestes from their power, had despised the age-honoured Fates, and violated their ancient decree.

(12) Stanley rightly translates this; the sense of which is, Orestes having been guilty of murder, shall find another equally guilty, who shall requite this on his head. Mr. Heath translates it thus, "since he is now polluted with blood, he "shall draw another pollution, besides that, on his own head:" this he explains as respecting the murder of Pyrrhus by Orestes, and refers us to the Andromache of Euripides. Nothing can be more foreign to the sense of the poet.

Begone where vengeance with terrific rage
Digs out the eyes, or from the mangled trunk
Remorseless rends the head; to slaughters go,
Abortions, lurking ambush, rampir'd force,
To suff'rings, to impalements, where the wretch
Writhes on the stake in tortures, yelling loud,
With many' a shriek: in feasts like these, ye hags
Abhorr'd, is your delight; sufficient proof
That execrable form; the desert wild,
Where the blood-rav'ning lion makes his den,
Such should inhabit; nor with impure tread
Pollute these golden shrines; begone, and graze
Without a keeper; for of such a herd
Th' indignant Gods disdain to take the charge.

CHORUS.

Now, royal Phœbus, hear me speak: in this
Not an associate art thou, but alone
Thou didst this deed, and thine alone the blame.

APOLLO.

Why this to me? Inform me; but be brief.

CHORUS.

Thy voice, pronounc'd from this oracular shrine,
Enjoin'd this wretch to shed his mother's blood.

APOLLO.

Enjoin'd him to avenge his father's death.

CHORUS.

To this strange murder promis'd thy protection.

APOLLO.

I charg'd him to seek refuge in this shrine.

CHORUS.

But these attendants thou with taunts insultest.

APOLLO.

Unworthy they t' approach this sacred seat.

CHORUS.

Such was our charge: we come not uncommanded.

APOLLO.

What is that honour? Make the glorious boast.

CHORUS.

To drive the murd'rers of their mothers hence.

APOLLO.

What, fav'ring her, whose bold hand slew her husband?

CHORUS.

Nor should his hands be stain'd with kindred blood.

APOLLO.

The sacred pledges of connubial Juno (13)
And Jove hast thou disparag'd, set at nought;
And Venus is disparag'd by thy words.
From whom the dearest joys, that sweeten life,
Arise; for hallow'd is the nuptial bed,
Of deeper sanctity than oaths, and guarded
By justice. If to those, whose mutual rage
Bathes in each other's blood, thy chast'ning hand
Is gentle; if thine eye looks milder on them,
Nor flames with wrath; unjustly does thy vengeance
Pursue Orestes; such I now behold
Thy threat'ning mien, to others more benign.
But Pallas, righteous queen, shall judge this cause.

(13) Apollo here speaks like the God of Wisdom: if Orestes was to be pursued with their vengeance, because he slew his mother, whilst they were favourable to that mother, though she had murdered her husband, they dishonoured Juno the goddess presiding over marriage, the nuptial treaties ratified by Jupiter, and the sweet endearments of Venus, more sacred than the oath with which the treaty was confirmed.

CHORUS.

But never, never will I quit this man.

APOLLO.

Pursue him then; to toil add fruitless toil.

CHORUS.

Think not thy words shall make my rage relent.

APOLLO.

Shall thy rage touch him? No; I brook it not.

CHORUS.

At Jove's high throne thou art reputed great:
Yet, since a mother's blood calls loud for vengeance,
My keen pursuit shall trace him step by step.

APOLLO.

To me his vows are paid; I will assist,
And set him free; for dreadful were the wrath
'Mongst gods and men, should I betray my suppliant.

CHORUS.

That moves not me.—These are his marks; observe them,
Unerring guides, though tongueless: follow, follow;
And, like the hound that by the drops of blood
Traces the wounded hind, let us pursue him.

The Scene changes to the Temple of Minerva at Athens.

ORESTES.

Hither, divine Minerva, by the mandate
Of Phœbus am I come. Propitious power,
Receive me by the Furies' tort'ring rage
Pursued, no vile unhallow'd wretch, nor stain'd
With guilty blood, but worn with toil, and spent
With many a painful step to other shrines,
And in the paths of men. By land, by sea
Wearied alike, obedient to the voice,
The oracles of Phœbus, I approach

Thy shrine, thy statue, goddess; here to fix
My stand, till judgement shall decide my cause.

[Here the Furies enter.]

CHORUS.

These toils oppress me, as with breathless haste
I urge the keen pursuit: o'er the long tract
Of continent, and o'er th' extended ocean,
Swift as the flying ship I hold my course,
Though on no pennons borne.—There, there he stands,
His speed outstripping mine. Have I then found thee?
With joy I snuff the scent of human blood.—
Take heed, take heed; keep careful watch; nor let
This murderer of his mother once more 'scape,
By secret flight, your vengeance: trembling, weak,
He hangs upon the image of the goddess,
And wishes to be clear'd of his base deeds.
It may not be: no: when the fluent moisture
Is sunk into the ground, 'tis lost for ever:
Can then a mother's blood, spilt on the earth,
Be from the earth recover'd? No. Thy hour
Of suff'ring is arriv'd, the hour that gives
The purple stream, that warms thy heart, to quench
My thirst, which burns to quaff thy blood, and bend
To the dark realms below thy wasted limbs;
There, for thy mother's murder, shalt thou learn
To taste of pain; there see whatever mortal
Dar'd an injurious deed, profan'd the gods,
Attack'd with ruffian violence the stranger,
Or rais'd his impious hand against a parent,
Each with vindictive pains condemn'd to groan,
His crimes requiting; for beneath the earth
The awful judge of mortals Pluto sits,

And with relentless justice marks their deeds.

ORESTES.

Train'd in affliction's rigid lore, I know
Many ablutions: when to speak I know
When to be silent: inspiration now,
With heav'nly wisdom prompts my tongue to plead.
The faded blood is vanish'd from my hands,
Nor from my mother's slaughter leaves a stain;
The recent crimson at Apollo's shrine
Wash'd off with lavers pure, with offer'd victims
Aton'd. This honest prelude might be grac'd
With many' an argument: nor came I hither
Consorted with a vile and impious band.
All things with time grow old, and wear away.
And now from hallow'd lips my pious pray'r
Invokes the power presiding o'er this realm,
Royal Minerva, that she haste to aid
Her suppliant: so with voluntary zeal
Myself, my country, all the Argive people,
To her with justice I devote for ever.
If in the coasts of Libya, on the banks
Of Triton (14), native stream, she sets her foot

(14) What shall we say to the wonderful birth of this celebrated goddess? Apollodorus gravely informs us, that Jupiter was enamoured of Thetis, and though the lady was coy, and changed herself into many forms to escape him, yet he obtained his desire. She told him, that if she now had a daughter, she would afterwards bring forth a son, who should enjoy the empire of the sky. Jupiter, finding her pregnant, and fearing her prediction, to avoid it, fairly swallowed her: this was a trick he learned of his father: the pregnancy however went on, though now it was transferred to the head of Jupiter, which in due time Prometheus, or as others say Vulcan, opened with an axe, and out leaped Minerva full-grown, and in complete armour. This was done on the banks of the Triton, a river of Libya, from whence Pallas is called Tritonia. Phurnutus tells us that the lady's name was Metis, which signifies, Counsel: this helps him to a tolerable solution of the allegory, that Jupiter, only by following wise and

Or bare, or buskin'd, prompt to aid her friends;
If o'er the plains of Phlegra, like a chief
That marshals his bold troops, she darts her eye,
Her presence I implore; though distant far,
The goddess hears; to free me from these ills.

CHORUS.

No: not Apollo, nor Minerva's pow'r
Shall set thee free, but that an abject outcast
Thou drag thy steps, seeking in vain to find
Rest to thy joyless soul, exhausted, worn,
A lifeless shadow. Yet thy pride replies not,
Me, and my threats despising, though to me
Devoted, my rich victim, and alive
To feed my rage, not offer'd on the altar.
Hear now the potent strain, that charms thee mine.

PROSODE.

Quickly, sisters, stand around,
Raise your choral warblings high;
Since, the guilty soul to wound,
Swells the horrid harmony.
Since to mortal man we show
How we give his fate to flow;
Since our will his doom ordains,
Show that justice 'mongst us reigns.
He, whose hands from guilt are pure,
Stands in innocence secure;

prudent counsel, μητιέτης καὶ συνετὸς ὤν, obtained the sovereignty of the skies: Prometheus therefore was the more proper to assist at the birth. It is only in continuation of the same allegory, that Minerva is said to have assisted Jupiter in the decisive battle against the giants in the plains of Phlegra, in which her service was so conspicuous, that she obtained the name of γιγαντοφόντις, the giant-killer. We are the better reconciled to this strange fiction, and to the explication of it, by the fine use to which Milton has applied it.

And from youth to honour'd age
Fears not our vindictive rage.
To the wretch, that strives to hide
Ruffian hands with murder died,
Cloth'd in terrors we appear,
Unrelentingly severe;
And, faithful to the injur'd dead,
Pour our vengeance on his head.

STROPHE 1.

Hear me, dread parent, sable-vested Night,
O hear th' avenger of each impious deed;
Whether we lie in shades conceal'd (15),
Or to the eye of day reveal'd!

(15) Ἀλαοῖσι καὶ δεδορκόσι, Stanleius recte vertit cæcis et videntibus; Interpretis Græci ζῶσι καὶ θανοῦσιν ineptit: Pueri vident. PAUW.

Veram scripturam, ποινᾶν, proculdubio nobis suggerit scholiastes, hæc ita interpretatus ζῶσι καὶ θανοῦσιν ἔκδικον. Pauwius tamen miro stupore occæcatus lectionem hanc commentitiam esse, neque ex Scholiastæ verbis colligi posse pronunciare sustinuit.—Scholiastæ autem assentior, appellatione cæcorum et videntium designari mortuos ac vivos, quenquam interpretationis hujus ineptiam vel pueros videre affirmat Pauwius. Sed talia quidem effutire longe est facillimum, probationibus vero idoneis astruere non cujusvis forsan hominis.—HEATH.

As the translator, by adhering to the interpretation of Pauw stands in the same predicament of a babbler blinded with wonderful stupidity, he must make his defence as well as he is able; whether he supports it with proper proofs, the candid reader will judge. The Furies in this very ode tell us, that it was a task assigned them by the Fates to pursue the murderer as long as he lived, ὅφρ' ἂν γᾶν ὑπέλθῃ: but at his death their commission ended: Æschylus in many places tells us, that in the regions below the guilty person came under the jurisdiction of the infernal Jupiter: we are also told, that the Furies, in the execution of their office, sometimes appeared to the guilty, as in the present case, armed with all their terrors; and that they sometimes pursue him ἀνηλίῳ λάμπᾳ, with silent ruin, equally investigable.

Δερκομένοισι καὶ δυσομμάτοις ὁμῶς.

From these considerations the translator was induced to look on the Furies as the avengers of each impious deed, not to the living and the dead, but to those that saw them, or did not see them,

Whether they lie in shades conceal'd,
Or to the eye of day reveal'd.

Seest thou how Phœbus robs me of my right
From my just rage the trembling victim freed,
Destin'd his mother's death t' atone,
And for her blood to shed his own!
O'er my victim raise the strain,
And let the dismal sound
His tortur'd bosom wound,
And to phrensy fire his brain.
Silent be the silver shell,
Whilst we chant the potent spell;
Then yelling bid th' infernal descant roll,
To harrow up his soul.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Avenging Fate, as bending o'er the loom
She wove the web, to us this part assign'd,
" Whoe'er the laws shall dare disdain,
" And his rude hand with murder stain,
" Pursue him, Furies, urge his rigorous doom,
" Till refuge in the realms below he find."
Ev'n there not free; my chast'ning pow'r
Pursues him to that dreary shore.
O'er my victim raise the strain,
And let the dismal sound
His tortur'd bosom wound,
And to phrensy fire his brain.
Silent be the silver shell,
Whilst we chant the potent spell;
Then yelling bid th' infernal descant roll,
To harrow up his soul.

STROPHE 2.

This task assign'd us at our natal hour,
Far from th' immortal gods our steps we bend:

Nor welcome at the social feast,
Nor honour'd with a splendent vest;
For mine I proudly claim the dreadful pow'r
From its firm base the ruin'd house to rend,
When in calm peace its ruthless lord
Distains with a friend's blood his sword.
Him, though strong, we rush to seize;
And for the new-pour'd blood
Demand his purple flood,
Glorying in the sacrifice;
Duteous hast'ning to remove
Cares like these from angry Jove;
And spare, whilst fierce for blood my vengeance flies,
The terrors of the skies.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

His wrathful eye Heav'n's mighty monarch rolls,
Awfully silent, on this blood stain'd race.
But all the gorgeous blaze of pow'r,
Which trembling mortals here adore,
When, mantled in these sable-shaded stoles,
With blood-besprinkled feet we urge the chase,
Since darkling to th' infernal shades,
And all its boasted glory fades.
Near him, as he flies, I bound (16),
And when, with guilt opprest,
His weary steps would rest,
Spurn him headlong to the ground.
Senseless he, perchance, and blind,
Such the phrensy of his mind,

(16) As the chorus generally danced whilst they sung these odes, and the Athenians were excellent actors, we may be assured that the gestures, the boundings of the Furies at this part were violent, and really horrible.

Such the deep gloom guilt spreads around his walls,
He knows not that he falls.

EPODE.

But shall shelt'ring wall or gloom
That from dark'ning guilt is spread,
Hide him from his rigorous doom,
Or protect his destin'd head?
Mine the vengeance to design,
And to stamp it deep is mine.
Sternly mindful of the crime,
Nor by man appeas'd, nor time,
When the wretch, whose deed unblest
Dares profane high Heav'n's behest,
Though conceal'd from mortal eyes
Through the sunless darkness flies,
We pursue the rugged chase,
And his dubious footsteps trace.
Hear then guilty mortals, hear,
And the righteous God revere;
Hear the task to me assign'd,
Fate the firm decree shall bind;
Mine the prize of old ordain'd,
Never with dishonour stain'd,
Though my drear abode profound
Night and darkness cover round.

MINERVA, ORESTES, CHORUS.

MINERVA.

It was a voice that call'd; distant far
I heard it, where Scamander laves the fields
My ancient right: to me the Grecian chiefs
With voluntary zeal assign'd this portion
Of their rich conquest, ever to be mine,

Selected as a gift to the brave race (17)
Of Theseus. With a speed that equals wings
My vig'rous steeds thence whirl'd my car, the wind
Against my Ægis rustling as I pass'd.
But who are these consorted here? Mine eye
Views them unterrified; but much I marvel.
What, and whence are you? To you all I speak,
To him, the stranger, seated at my image,
And you, whose hideous shape resembles nought
Of mortal race, nor goddesses in Heav'n
Seen by the gods, nor like the human form.
But the deform'd to taunt with obloquy
Is unbeseeming; Justice starts at it.

CHORUS.

Daughter of Jove, take our report in brief.
We are the gloomy progeny of night,
Call'd Furies in the drear abodes below.

MINERVA.

I know your race, and aptly added titles.

CHORUS.

Soon shalt thou learn my honours, and my office.

MINERVA.

Speak clearly then, without perplexing preface.

CHORUS.

'Tis ours to drive the murd'rers from the house.

MINERVA.

This all the vengeance to their guilt assign'd?

(17) After the destruction of Troy, Sigeum, in the division of its territory, was assigned to the Athenians, who built a temple on that promontory to their tutelary goddess, Minerva. This had lately fallen into the hands of the Mitylenians. The poet, who was of a most generous spirit, and in all his tragedies endeavoured to inspire his countrymen with a military ardour, takes this opportunity to encourage them to recover that tract.—STANLEY.

CHORUS.

Where they shall never taste or peace or joy.

MINERVA.

And does thy yelling voice thus drive HIM out?

CHORUS.

He dar'd to be the murd'rer of his mother.

MINERVA.

Urg'd by the force of no necessity?

CHORUS.

What force could urge the wretch to kill his mother?

MINERVA.

He hears but half, that hears one party only.

CHORUS.

He would refuse an oath, nor dares propose it (18).

MINERVA.

Thy aim seems rather to obtain the fame
Of justice, than to execute her laws.

CHORUS.

How so? Inform me; thou art rich in wisdom.

MINERVA.

Deeds of injustice are not clear'd by oaths.

CHORUS.

Hear thou the cause, and judge with righteous justice.

MINERVA.

Rests the decision of the cause on me?

CHORUS.

We reverence thee as worthiest 'midst the worthy.

MINERVA.

Say, stranger, what canst thou reply to this?
Speak first thy race, thy country, thy misfortunes;

(18) This is said in allusion to the practice of the court of Areopagus, where in charges of murder both the accuser and accused were obliged to plead on oath.—STANLEY from LYSIAS.

Then urge thy plea against this accusation;
If trusting in the justice of thy cause,
Thus seated near my altar, thou embrace
With reverend hands, a suppliant as Ixion (19),
My statue. Be thy answer short and clear.

ORESTES.

Royal Minerva, let me first remove
What thy last words, with much concern, suggest.
I am not stain'd with blood, nor shall my hand

(19) The ancients took every method reason and religion could suggest to impress a horror of shedding human blood: Hector could not even make a libation of wine, because his hands were defiled with blood, though it was the blood of enemies, whom he had slain in the noblest of all causes, the defence of his country,

By me that holy office were profan'd;
Ill fits it me, with human gore distain'd,
To the pure skies these horrid hands to raise,
Or offer Heav'n's great sire polluted praise.

Il. vi. POPE.

For the same reason the pious Æneas could not touch his Penates, though to snatch them from the flames of burning Troy, but consigns them to his father,

Thou, thou, my sire, our gods and relics bear;
These hands, yet horrid with the stains of war,
Refrain their touch unhallow'd till the day,
When the pure streams shall wash these stains away.

Æneid. ii. PITT.

Hence their various rites of purifications, their oblations and sacrifices. Under this idea the priestess of Delphos is shocked at seeing in the temple a man abhorred by the gods, because his hands are stained with blood; and the Furies thus insult Apollo,

See all defil'd with gore thy throne;
There sate the murd'rer dropping blood.

Minerva is here apprehensive of this pollution to her temple; this indeed is but hinted, and that with much tenderness, by the bare mention of Ixion. The famous Alexander Ross tells us, that "Ixion was the son of Plegias, who having murdered his father-in-law, went up and down the earth as a vagabond; at last Jupiter did pity him, and expiating his crime, received him into Heaven." The concern of Orestes to remove this suggestion shows, that he clearly understood the goddess; and her answer expresses her satisfaction as to this point.

Pollute thy statue: what I urge in proof
Bears strong conviction. Him, whose hands are red
With blood, the laws forbid to plead his cause,
Till with its flowing gore the new-slain victim
Has made atonement, and the cleansing wave
Restor'd his purity. In other shrines
Long since these hallow'd rites have been perform'd
With offer'd victims and the fluent stream.
Blameless of this offence, I next declare
My race: An Argive: nor to thee unknown
My sire, the leader of the naval hosts,
The royal Agamemnon; for with him
Thy conqu'ring hand laid the proud walls of Troy
In dust: returning to his house he perish'd
By deeds of baseness; for my dark-soul'd mother
With various trains in private murder'd him;
Th' ensanguin'd bath attested the foul deed.
I, then an exile, bending back my steps,
Slew her that gave me birth; nor shall my tongue
Deny the deed; it was a vengeance due
To my lov'd father's shade: so Phœbus deem'd,
Who urg'd me, and denounc'd heart-rending woes,
Should I shrink back refusing to avenge
The guilt: but if with justice, be thou judge.
To thy deciding voice my soul submits.

MINERVA.

This is a cause of moment, and exceeds
The reach of mortal man: nor is it mine
To judge, when blood with eager rage excites
To vengeance. Thou with preparation meet
Hast to my shrine approach'd a suppliant pure,
Without offence; and to my favour'd city
Uncharg'd with blame I readily receive thee.

Let these, whose ruthless rage knows not the touch
Of pity, not succeeding in their plea,
Retire awhile, till judgement shall decide
The contest: from their breasts black poison flows,
And taints the sick'ning earth. Thus I pronounce
To each, unequal in this dubious strife
To give content to both. But since to me
Th' appeal is made, it shall be mine t' elect
Judges of blood, their faith confirm'd by oath,
And ratify the everlasting law.
Prepare you for the trial, call your proofs,
Arrange your evidence, bring all that tends
To aid your cause: I from the holiest men
That grace my city will select to judge
This cause with justice; men, whose sanctity
Abhors injustice, and reveres an oath.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Confusion on these upstart laws!
Havoc with haughty stride
Shall march, and wave her banner wide,
If venial be this bloody caitiff's cause.
Impunity shall mortals lead
To ev'ry savage deed,
And prompt the son with rage unblest
To plant the dagger in the parents' breast.
I smile at all this lawless force;
Nor shall our dreaded pow'r
In vengeance visit impious mortals more:
No: let Destruction take her destin'd course.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Whilst his own anguish one shall moan,

He hears his neighbour tell,
Appall'd, of deeds as fierce, as fell;
Tear falls to tear, and groan succeeds to groan.
Nor shall the rolling storm of wo
One gleam of comfort know.
When anguish rends the tortur'd breast,
Be not to us the mournful call addrest.
" Where is your throne, ye Furies, where
Justice," the father cries,
Or the pale mother, as in blood she lies:
But justice from her throne is exil'd far.

STROPHE 2.

Yet are there hours, when conscious fear
And the stern eye, that darts
Severely through their secret hearts,
With sober counsels check their mad career.
For when no ray of heavenly light
Breaks through the sullen night,
Dark deeds ensue, and Virtue's pow'r
By man, by state is reverenc'd no more.
Shall he, the wretch that scorns control,
And spurns each sacred law,
Or he that drags his chain with servile awe,
Feel the sweet peace that calms the virtuous soul?

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Plac'd in the midst does strength reside.
With an indignant frown
On each extreme the gods look down;
Injustice is the child of impious Pride.
But all the joys, that life can know,
From temper'd wisdom flow.
To Justice chief thy soul incline,
And bow with reverence at her hallow'd shrine.

Nor dare, allur'd by cursed gold,
With foot profane and bold
To spurn her altars: Vengeance waits the crime,
And arm'd with terrors knows her destin'd time.

EPODE.

Let each with awe profound
A parent's honour'd name obey:
Each to thy milder voice, humanity,
Attentive homage pay,
When for the stranger thou art found
Pleading thy strains of pious potency.
He that to Virtue's heav'nly pow'r
Unforc'd his willing soul shall bow,
Nor Ruin's tyrant rage shall know,
Nor keen Affliction's tort'ring hour.
But he, that dares her sacred laws despise,
Trampling on Justice to amass his prey,
Appall'd shall hear the rushing whirlwinds rise,
And tremble at the storms that swell the sea.
Wild with despair
He pours his pray'r,
Whirl'd in the giddy tempest round;
His blasted pride
The gods deride,
And all his daring hopes confound;
Smile, as they view him rack'd with pain
Bound in Misfortune's iron chain;
As on the pointed rock they see him thrown,
To perish there unpitied and alone.

MINERVA, APOLLO, ORESTES, CHORUS.

The JUDGES seated.

MINERVA.

Now, herald, let thy voice to all my people
Proclaim attention: sound the Tuscan trumpet (20),
That its ear-piercing notes may fill the city,
Commanding silence, and impressing awe
Due to this great assembly; that the state
May learn my everlasting laws, and hear
The righteous judgement that decides this cause.

CHORUS.

Royal Apollo, where thy rule extends,
There lord it: but what right canst thou claim here?

APOLLO.

To give my evidence I come. This man
Is at my shrine a suppliant, at my shrine
He sojourns; with ablutions (21) pure I cleans'd
His stains of blood; and now shall plead his cause,
Our common cause, since for his mother's death
Your accusations reach ev'n me? but thou
Urge, as thou canst, thy plea: open the charge.

MINERVA.

This is incumbent on you; open then

(20) The Hetrurians were thought to have been the inventors of trumpets. In their towers upon the sea-coasts, there were people appointed to be continually upon the watch both by day and night, and to give a proper signal if any thing happened extraordinary. This was done by a blast from a trumpet.—BRYANT'S ANALYSIS, *vol. i. p. 405.*

(21) This is perfectly in conformity to the usage of antiquity. Whoever received into his house a person polluted with blood, expiated him with ablutions, sacrifices, and the other necessary rites; after which the stranger had a right to the most inviolable laws of hospitality. Thus Ixion having been expiated by Jupiter, had a claim to his protection.

The charge: th' accuser's voice must first explain
Clearly through ev'ry circumstance the cause.

CHORUS.

Though we are many, brief shall be our words.
Now answer me in order, word for word.
My first demand is, Didst thou kill thy mother?

ORESTES.

I did; and never shall deny the deed.

CHORUS.

First of the three this is one signal foil (22).

ORESTES.

Unmov'd I stand, and thy proud vaunts are vain.

CHORUS.

Declare it then at once, How didst thou kill her?

ORESTES.

I drew my sword, and plung'd it in her breast.

CHORUS.

At whose persuasion? or by whose advice?

ORESTES.

By HIS oracular voice: he will attest it.

CHORUS.

The Prophet urge thee to this bloody deed!

ORESTES.

Nor thus far have I to accuse my fate.

(22) In the Lucta, the victory was adjudged to him who gave his antagonist three falls: this is sufficiently attested by the epigram upon Milo, who, having challenged the whole assembly, and finding none that durst encounter him, claimed the crown; but, as he was going to receive it, unfortunately fell down; whereat the people cried out, that he had forfeited the prize; then Milo

Ἀνστὰς δ' ἐν μέσσοισιν ἀνέκραγεν, Οὐχὶ τρὶ' ἐστιν;
Ἕν κεῖμαι, λοιπὸν τ' ἄλλα με τὶς ϑαλέτω.

Arose, and standing in the midst thus cry'd,
One single fall cannot the prize decide,
And who is here can throw me th' other two?

POTTER'S Archæol. Græc.

CHORUS.

Far other language the condemning vote
Will teach thy tongue.

ORESTES.

My confidence is firm;
My father from the tomb will send me aid.

CHORUS.

Confiding in the dead, he slew his mother.

ORESTES.

Her breast was spotted with a double stain.

CHORUS.

What may this mean? Speak, and inform thy Judges.

ORESTES.

She slew my father when she slew her husband (23).

CHORUS.

And yet thou livest: from that stain she's free.

ORESTES.

Why, whilst she liv'd, didst thou not drive her out?

CHORUS.

She had no kindred blood with him she slew.

ORESTES.

Is mine allied then to my mother's blood?

CHORUS.

How else, before thy birth, did she sustain,
How nourish thee? The murd'rous wretch disowns
That dearest of all ties, a mother's blood.

ORESTES.

Now let me call thy testimony; now

(23) When she slew her husband, she slew my father, and thus in one act was guilty of a double murder. By the law, which the Romans borrowed from Greece, the father and the son are esteemed as the same person, pater et filius habentur pro una persona. By this judicious observation of Pauw, we comprehend the meaning of the answer in the next line.

Declare, Apollo, if I slew her justly:
For that I slew her, in such circumstance,
I not deny: if rightfully or not,
Decide, that I to these may plead thy sanction.

APOLLO.

To you, the great and reverend council here
Plac'd by Minerva, will I speak and truly;
For never shall the god of prophecy
Pronounce a falsehood; never have I utter'd
From my oracular seat to man, to woman,
Or state, save what the great Olympian Sire (24)
Shall have commanded. Of his sovereign justice
Learn you the force, and bow to his high will;
Nor deem an oath of greater pow'r than Jove.

CHORUS.

This oracle, thou say'st, was dictated
By Jove, to charge Orestes, whilst his hand
Was arm'd with vengeance for his father's murder,
To pay no reverence to his mother's blood.

APOLLO.

Of higher import is it, when a man
Illustrious for his virtues, by the gods
Exalted to the regal throne, shall die,

(24) The priestess of the temple of Delphos had before informed us, that Jupiter himself had inspired Apollo with his prophetic skill; and this god afterwards demands reverence to his oracles as the voice of Jupiter. Virgil was too well versed in antiquity to omit such a circumstance; hence his ill-omened prophetess, to give the greater dread to her prediction, says,

Quæ Phœbo pater omnipotens, mihi Phœbus Apollo
Prædixit.

Virgil might possibly take this from Æschylus, as Macrobius affirms; or both might draw it from the everlasting fountain of Homer, who makes Apollo say at his birth,

Χρήσω τ' ἀνθρώποισι Διὸς πημερτέα βουλήν.—Hymn. v. 132.

Die by a woman's hand, by one that dares not
Bend, like an Amazon, the stubborn bow.
But hear me, Pallas, hear me, you that sit
In awful judgement to decide this cause.
Victorious from the war, with glory crown'd,
And grac'd with many' a trophy, at the bath
She smilingly receiv'd him; there refresh'd,
As o'er his head he threw the splendid robe
Prepar'd t' entangle him, she slew her husband.
So died the chief, the glorious, the renown'd,
The leader of the warlike troops of Greece:
And such I speak this woman, reverend Judges,
To strike your souls with horror at her deeds.

CHORUS.

So Jove, it seems, respects the father's fate;
Yet on his father he could bind the chain,
The hoary Saturn: that his deed gainsays
Thy words: I pray you mark the poor evasion.

APOLLO.

Detested hags, th' abhorrence of the gods!
He could unbind these chains, and the release
Has a medicinal pow'r. But when the blood,
That issues from the slain, sinks in the dust,
It never rises more. For this my sire
No remedy admits, in all besides
With sovereign pow'r or ruins or restores.

CHORUS.

See with what ill-judg'd zeal thy arguments
Labour t' absolve him! Shall the wretch, whose hand
Spilt on the earth the kindred blood that flow'd
Within his mother's veins, return to Argos
Lord of his father's house? Before what altar,

Sacred to public off'rings, shall he bend?
What friendly laver shall admit his hands?

APOLLO.

This too shall I explain; and mark me well,
If reason guides my words (25). The mother's power
Produces not the offspring, ill call'd hers.
No: 'tis the father, that to her commits
The infant plant; she but the nutrient soil
That gives the stranger growth, if fav'ring Heav'n
Denies it not to flourish: this I urge
In proof, a father may assert that name
Without a mother's aid: an instance sits
Minerva, daughter of Olympian Jove;
Not the slow produce of nine darkling months,
But form'd at once in all her perfect bloom:
Such from no pregnant goddess ever sprung.
Thy state, thy people, Pallas, be it mine
T' exalt to glory, and what else of greatness
I know to give. This suppliant to thy shrine
I sent, assuring his eternal faith;
Thy votary he, and his descendants thine,
From sire to son through all succeeding ages.

(25) The righteous Pauw is highly offended at the impiety of the tragedy: one cannot but smile to see with what zeal he enters into the interests of these hideous sisters, as if he were enamoured of them. This passage gives him great offence: Ad hæc ego nauseo hic: Nexum considera: Sic ineptias ineptissimas tibi deprehendes statim: hæc tamen philosophica videbantur Stanleio. Stanley had too just a taste to judge of ancient sentiment by modern manners or more enlightened knowledge. Wretched as this sophistry is, it certainly was at that time held as deep philosophy; otherwise the learned Euripides, who was not generous towards Æschylus, would not have put this sentiment into the mouth of Orestes in his plea to the father of Clytemnestra:

> My father was the author of my being;
> Thy daughter brought me forth: he gave me life,
> Which she but foster'd: to the higher cause
> A higher reverence then I deem'd was due.—ELECT.

MINERVA.

The pleas are urg'd: these now I charge to give
Sentence, with strict regard to truth and justice.

CHORUS.

We have discharg'd our shafts: and now I wait
To hear what sentence shall adjudge this cause.

MINERVA.

What, am I never to escape your censure?

CHORUS.

Give what you've heard due weight; and with pure hearts
Pronouncing sentence reverence your high oath.

MINERVA.

Ye citizens of Athens, now attend,
Whilst this great council in a cause of blood
First give their judgement. But through future ages
This awful court shall to the hosts of Ægeus
With uncorrupted sanctity remain.
Here on this Mount of Mars (26) the Amazons
Of old encamp'd, when their embattled troops
March'd against Theseus, and in glitt'ring arms
Breath'd vengeance; here their new-aspiring tow'rs
Rais'd high their rampir'd heads to storm his tow'rs
And here their hallow'd altars rose to Mars:
Hence its illustrious name the cliff retains,
The Mount of Mars. In this the solemn state
Of this majestic city, and the awe (27)

(26) Nothing in general is more uncertain than the origin of places, and the reason of their names: when this is lost in the obscurity of time, what remains to the antiquarian, but to analyse the word, and from thence deduce the cause? Our modern mythologists are supremely knowing in this process; remote ages were not unacquainted with it. Our poet however has the address even on this slight foundation to build up a pleasing compliment to his countrymen.

(27) This whole charge of Minerva is worthy of the Goddess of Wisdom. By celebrating the high antiquity of the temple, its honourable foundation, the

That rises thence shall be a holy guard
Against injustice, shall protect the laws
Pure and unsullied from th' oppressive pow'r
Of innovation, and th' adulterate stain
Of foreign mixture: should thy hand pollute
The liquid fount with mud, where wilt thou find
The grateful draught? Let not my citizens
Riot in lawless anarchy, nor wear
The chain of tyrant pow'r, nor from their state
Loose all the curb of rigour: this remov'd,
What mortal man, uncheck'd with sense of fear,
Would reverence justice? Let the majesty,
That here resides, impress your souls with awe:
Your country has a fence, your town a guard,
Such as no nation knows; not those that dwell
In Scythia (28), or the cultur'd realms of Pelops,
This court superior to th' alluring glare
Of pestilent gold, this court that claims your awe
Severely just, I constitute your guard,
Watchful to shield your country and its peace:
These my commands to ev'ry future age
Have I extended. Now behoves you, judges,
Give test of your integrity; bring forth
The shells; with strictest justice give your suffrage,
And reverence your high oath. This is my charge.

CHORUS.

Nor of their honours rob this train, whose pow'r
Is dreadful in the drear abodes below.

dignity of the court, the authority and impartiality of its sentence, the purity and superior excellence of the laws, she inspires that reverence to the laws, and the administration of them, which constitutes the firmest security of obedience and good manners.

(28) By this mention of Scythia the poet alludes to Anacharsis, the celebrated lawgiver of that country, cotemporary with Solon.

APOLLO.

And be my oracles, the voice of Jove,
Rever'd, nor seek to move their firm decree.

CHORUS.

Beyond thy charge protecting deeds of blood,
Nor reverend are thy oracles, nor pure.

APOLLO.

Think of the expiation, which of old
Ixion made for blood: wilt thou arraign
My father's councils there? Or slept his wisdom?

CHORUS.

Thou say'st it: but if justice fails me here,
This land shall feel the terrors of my vengeance.

APOLLO.

Unhonour'd thou by ev'ry pow'r of Heav'n,
Or young, or old, to triumph here is mine.

CHORUS.

Such in the house of Pheres (29) were thy deeds,
When, won by thy alluring voice, the Fates
On mortal man conferr'd immortal honours.

APOLLO.

To aid, to grace the pious, when their pray'rs
Rightly invoke our influence, is just.

CHORUS.

What, hast thou crush'd the pow'r of ancient Fate,

(29) Admetus, the son of Pheres, asked Alcestis in marriage; her father consented on this hard condition, that he should yoke a lion and a boar to his chariot: he addressed his vows to Apollo and Hercules, and by their aid rendered the savages gentle. Some time after, Admetus being dangerously ill, again addressed his vows to Apollo; the god refused his salutary aid, but upon condition that one of his near relations would devote himself to a voluntary death for him: this Alcestis did: Hercules, being then on his expedition to bring Cerberus from hell, brought back Alcestis to her husband.—FULGENTIUS. —Whether the poet alludes to this story, or to some other with which we are not acquainted, the learned reader will judge.

And wouldst thou now delude our honour'd age?

APOLLO.

Soon shall thy malice, baffled in this cause,
Shed its black venom harmless to thy foes.

CHORUS.

Since thy proud youth insults my hoary years,
I wait th' event in silence, and suspend
The fury of my vengeance on this city.

MINERVA.

Last to give suffrage in this cause is mine:
In favour of Orestes shall I add
My vote: for as no mother gave me birth,
My grace in all things, save the nuptial rites,
Attends the male, as from my sire I drew
The vigour of my soul. No woman's fate
Stain'd with her husband's blood, whom nature form'd
Lord of his house, finds partial preference here.
Orestes, if the number of the votes
Be equal, is absolv'd. Now from the urn
Let those among the Judges, to whose honour
This office is assign'd, draw forth the lots.

ORESTES.

O Phœbus, what th' event that waits this cause!

CHORUS.

O Night, dark mother, through thy sable gloom
Seest thou these things? Now on the doubtful edge
Of black despair I stand, or joyful light,
Driven out with infamy, or grac'd with honours.

APOLLO.

Now, strangers, count the lots with righteous heed,
And with impartial justice sever them.
One shell misplac'd haply brings ruin, one
May raise again a desolated house.

MINERVA.

He is absolv'd, free from the doom of blood,
For equal are the numbers of the shells.

ORESTES.

O thou, whose tutelary pow'r preserv'd
The honours of my house, thou, goddess, thou
Hast to his country and his native rites
Restor'd this exile; and each Greek shall say,
This Argive to his father's throne returns,
So Pallas wills, and Phœbus, and the god
All-pow'rful to protect: my father's death
He mark'd severe, and looks indignant down
On those that patronize my mather's cause.
First to this country, and to this thy people
Through time's eternal course I pledge my faith,
And bind it with an oath; now to my house
I bend my steps: never may chieftain thence
Advance against this land with ported spear.
If any shall hereafter violate
My oath now made, though then these mould'ring bones
Rest in the silent tomb, my shade shall raise
Invincible distress, disasters, toils,
To thwart them, and obstruct their lawless march,
Till in dismay repentant they abhor
Their enterprise. But to the social pow'rs,
That reverence this thy state, and lift the lance
In its defence, benevolent shall be
My gentler influence. Hail, goddess; hail,
Ye guardians of the city: be your walls
Impregnable, and in the shock of war
May conquest grace the spear that aids your cause!

CHORUS.

I burst with rage. With cruel pride

These youthful gods my slighted age deride.
And, the old laws disdaining to obey,
Rend from my hands my prey.
Tortur'd with grief's corroding smart,
And taught disgrace and scorn to know,
Distilling from my anguish'd heart
The pestilential drop shall flow:
Where'er it falls, nor fruit around,
Nor leaf shall grace the blasted ground;
Through the sick air its baleful dews
A caustic venom shall diffuse;
And breathing on this hateful race
With deep rough scars the beauteous form deface.
Vainly shall I heave my sighs,
Or bid my angry vengeance rise?
To insults, which my bosom rend,
Vulgar spirits scorn to bend:
And shall thy daughters, awful Night, in vain
Of their disgrace complain?

MINERVA.

Let my entreaties move you; bear not this
With such deep anger; for no conquest here
Wounds your insulted honour: from the urn
The lots came equal, so dispos'd by truth,
To thee no insult off'ring; and from Jove
Flow'd splendid signs: he gave the oracle,
He added his high test, that for the deed
Orestes should not suffer. Breathe not then
Your heavy vengeance on this land; restrain
Your indignation; o'er these sick'ning fields
Drop not your pestilential dews, nor blast
Their glitt'ring verdure, and their springing seeds.
And here I pledge my faith, this grateful land

Shall willingly receive you, raise your seats
High at their blazing hearths, and, with deep awe
Imprest, pay reverend honours to your power.

CHORUS.

I burst with rage. With cruel pride
These youthful gods my slighted age deride:
And, the old laws disdaining to obey,
Rend from my hands my prey.
Tortur'd with grief's corroding smart,
And taught disgrace and scorn to know,
Distilling from my anguish'd heart
The pestilential drop shall flow;
Where'er it falls, nor fruit around
Nor leaf shall grace the blasted ground;
Through the sick air its baleful dews
A caustic venom shall diffuse;
And breathing on this hated race
With deep rough scars the beauteous form deface.
Vainly shall I heave my sighs,
Or bid my angry vengeance rise?
To insults, which my bosom rend,
Vulgar spirits scorn to bend;
And shall thy daughters, awful Night, in vain
Of their disgrace complain?

MINERVA.

No, you are not disgrac'd; nor let your wrath,
Immortal as you are, to mortal man
Spread desolation o'er the earth. I too
Prevail with Jove. And wherefore should I say
Of all the gods I only know the keys (30)

(30) This is a very curious passage, as it informs us that Minerva alone, of all the gods, had the command of the thunder of Jupiter: hence the learned Virgil,

That ope those solid doors, within whose vaults
His thunders sleep? Of these there is no need.
By me persuaded let thy hasty tongue
Forbear those threats, from which no fruit can flow,
But ruin to the earth: compose that rage,
Whose swelling tide o'erflows all bounds, with me
In the same mansion, and with equal honours
Rever'd, enjoying through these ample realms
The prime oblations, victims doom'd to bleed
For blessings on the birth, or nuptial hour,
That thou shalt thank me for this friendly counsel.

CHORUS.

Shall I brook this? Shall I then deign
In this curs'd land to spend my slighted age,
And my lost honours mourn in vain?
No: be each vengeful thought inflam'd with rage.
Ah me, the keen, the madd'ning smart!
Deep, deep it cuts, it rends my heart.
Hear, awful Night, my raving passion hear!
These gods, with a malignant smile,
Ah me! my baffled pow'r beguile,
And from my brows the public honours tear.

Ipsa Jovis rapidum jaculata e nubibus ignem.
Æn. i. v. 46.

She, for the crime of Ajax, from above
Launch'd through the clouds the fiery bolts of Jove.—PITT.

At the same time it contains an oblique threat of the severest nature, but conveyed in the gentlest manner, showing, that she waved her power to force their compliance, and condescended to entreat, and giving an example of that placability to which she endeavoured to persuade these angry powers.

As this foul sisterhood was driven from the society of the gods, admitted to no feast, nor suffered to abide in any temple, this offer of Minerva was very advantageous to them, and did them the greatest honour; and, as it was urged with the gentlest and most insinuating courtesy, it is no wonder, that they suffered themselves to be prevailed upon to accept it. From their consent to abide here as friends, their harsh name of Erinnyes was changed to Eumenides.

MINERVA.

Thine anger will I bear with, for thy years
Are more than mine, thy wisdom more; though Jove
Hath with no niggard grace on me bestow'd
A prudent sense. You yet are strangers here;
But I foresee, when once your seats are fix'd,
These scenes will be delightful, and the flow
Of future years to the inhabitants
Roll more abundant honours. Where Erechtheus
Rais'd high his regal structures, thou shalt hold
Thy residence, receiving from the men,
And from the train of females, such high honours
As mortals never paid thee. Cast not then
On these my realms the pestilent bane, that fires
Beyond the rage of wine the frantic youth
To wild ensanguin'd slaughter: in their hearts
Pour not the fury of the crested cock
Exciting discord, broils, and civil war.
To foreign wars, when dangers threaten nigh,
Let glory lead their arms: domestic strife
Is hateful to my soul: bethink thee well,
Thou hast thy choice, by courtesy to win
Returns of courtesy, and reverenc'd high
To share this country grateful to the gods.

CHORUS.

Shall I brook this? Shall I then deign
In this curs'd land to spend my slighted age,
And my lost honours mourn in vain?
No: be each vengeful thought inflam'd with rage.
Ah me, the keen, the madd'ning smart!
Deep, deep it cuts, it rends my heart.
Hear, awful Night, my raving passion hear!

These gods with a malignant smile,
Ah me! my baffled pow'r beguile,
And from my brows the public honours tear.

MINERVA.

I will not yet surcease to speak thee fair;
And never with just cause shalt thou complain
That with inhospitable pride my youth,
And the rude race of mortals dwelling here,
Drove thee, an ancient goddess, with disgrace
An outcast from this land. If yet the power
Of mild persuasion, dropping from my lips
In words of sweet and soothing courtesy,
Hath not lost all its virtue, thou wilt stay:
If thou disdain to stay, yet not with justice
Canst thou with wrath or vengeance load this town,
Nor on its people shed thy baneful dews.
'Tis in thy choice to bless this land, and fix
With everlasting honours here thy seat.

CHORUS.

What seat, say, royal virgin, shall be mine?

MINERVA.

Where misery never comes. Assent, accept it.

CHORUS.

I do assent. What honour now awaits me?

MINERVA.

That, without thee, no house shall rise to glory.

CHORUS.

Wilt thou do this, advance my honour thus?

MINERVA.

Him that reveres thee, shall my power protect.

CHORUS.

And shall thy word stand unimpair'd by time?

MINERVA.

It is not mine to violate my faith.

CHORUS.

Thy words have almost sooth'd me to a calm,
And the high storm of anger dies away.

MINERVA.

The charms of friendship here shalt thou enjoy.

CHORUS.

Say, with what strains shall I salute this land?

MINERVA.

Such as, allied to conquest, from the earth,
From the rich dews of ocean, from the sky
Soft-temper'd with the genial sun, may wake
Ambrosial gales diffusing o'er this earth
Luxuriance to its fruits, and to its flocks
Prolific vigour, to its peopled towns
Th' unfading glow of health. Be this thy charge;
Mine, in the glorious toils of war to grace
Their fame-ennobled arms with victory.

CHORUS.

Goddess, here thy seat I share,
Hostile to this town no more;
Which the dreadful god of war,
And the Thund'rer's sovereign power,

Give the pride of Greece to rise
Guardian of the rites divine,
Glory of the fav'ring skies,
Give to watch o'er Freedom's shrine.

I too breathe the potent prayer:
May the sun's ambrosial ray,

Rolling o'er the fruitful year,
All its richest charms display!

MINERVA.

For my lov'd city with a willing mind
This do I, seating here these awful powers
That yield with much reluctance; for o'er man
The Fates assign them a despotic sway.
And he, that feels their terrors, often knows not
Whence springs the vengeful wrath, whose iron scourge
Imbitters life: for the sire's long-pass'd crimes
Draw to their chast'ning hand the suff'ring son;
And, 'midst his thoughts of greatness, silent ruin
With ruthless hate pursues, and crushes him.

CHORUS.

O'er their saplings spreading fair
May no chill wind noxious blow;
Nor the dry and scorching air
Singe their fresh buds' opening glow.

For my sake may no disease
Sicken o'er the blasted year:
May their teeming flocks increase,
And a double offspring bear.

'Gainst the solemn festal day
Numerous may their herds arise;
Sportive o'er the rich fields play,
Gift of the propitious skies.

MINERVA.

Hear this, ye guardians of the state, and know
Her word shall be accomplish'd; for the gods
That tread the spangled skies, and those that hold
In the dark realms beneath their solemn thrones,

Revere her awful pow'r; and her high strains
To mortal man in accents dread pronounce
Blessings to some, to some a life of woes.

CHORUS.

May no harsh untimely doom
Sweep the manly youth away;
May the virgins' ripening bloom
Crown with love the bridal day.

You, that to the Fates allied (31)
Claim this just and ample power;
You, that o'er each house preside,
Sovereign rulers of each hour;

Goddesses, with holy dread
Whose high state mankind revere,
Here your softest influence shed,
Here extend your guardian care.

MINERVA.

This ready zeal accorded to my country
Delights me; and with ardour must I love
Gentle persuasion, that hath tun'd my voice

(31) Hesiod, recounting the progeny of Night, says,

Καὶ μοίρας καὶ κῆρας ἐγείνατο νηλεοποίνας,
Κλωθώ τε, Λάχεσίν τε, καὶ Ἄτροπον· αἵτε βροτοῖσι
Γεινομένοισι δίδοῦσιν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε.—Theog. v. 217.

She gave birth to the Fates and the merciless Destinies, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos; who assign to mortals at their birth good and evil.—It may not perhaps be easy to distinguish precisely the different offices of these kindred powers: by the Fates was designed a secret and immutable series of events necessarily flowing from their causes; and their firm decrees extended over gods and men, as we learn from Phurnutus and Sallust the philosopher. The Destinies had their direction over human life, influencing the birth, the present, and the future fortune of mortals. So that the Fates seem more peculiarly to have presided over nations and cities, the Destinies over individuals.

To move them from their stern and fierce resolves.
The pleading voice of Jove hath here prevail'd;
And my warm efforts in the cause of mercy
Extend their triumph through all future time.

CHORUS.

Ne'er may Discord's hideous power
Here unsated stalk its round:
Slaughter ne'er with kindred gore
Madly drench the thirsty ground;

Whilst Revenge in barb'rous pride
Shakes the streets with thund'ring tread,
Blood for blood demands, and wide
Joys the mutual rage to spread.

But to union's soft command
May their minds harmonious move;
Leagu'd in war, a friendly band;
Tun'd in peace to social love.

MINERVA.

So the mild accents of the soothing tongue,
Attun'd by wisdom, win their easy way:
And to this people from these horrid forms
I see much good. With gentle courtesy
Their courtesy requiting, always own'd
By acts of highest reverence, you, whose care
Is watchful o'er this country and this seat
Of justice, all shall reap the meed of glory.

CHORUS.

Hail, with wealth, with glory grac'd
Citizens of Athens, hail!
Next to Jove in glory plac'd,
Never may your honours fail!

Train'd to wisdom's sober lore,
Favour'd with Minerva's love,
Guarded by her virgin power,
Dear through her to sovereign Jove.

MINERVA.

And you all hail! But be it mine to show
The place assign'd you for your residence.
Go to those sacred flames, they will conduct you,
And from these hallow'd victims sink with speed
To the dark shades below; imprison there
Whate'er is noxious to these realms; whate'er
Has influence to bless them, send in triumph.
And you, high-lineag'd guardians of the state,
Attend these stranger-guests to their new seats,
And be each gentle thought attun'd to good.

CHORUS.

Once more hail, and hail again,
All that here have fix'd your seat;
Mortal and immortal train,
Guardians of Minerva's state!

Here your residence I share,
To my power due homage pay,
Ne'er shall wo or sullen care
Cloud with grief life's golden day

MINERVA.

I like these votive measures; and will send
The bright flames of these splendor-shedding torches,
With those that guard my hallow'd image here,
Attendant on you to the dark abodes
Beneath the earth. And let th' Athenian train,
The grace, the glory of the wide-stretch'd world,

Their manly youth, their virgins' roseate bloom,
And their age-honour'd matrons, now advance,
Array'd in richest vesture darting round
Its vermeil-tinctur'd radiance; let the torches
Blaze, that this sable troop through future times
May shine conspicuous for their friendly aid.

THE ATTENDANT TRAIN.

Remove then from this hallow'd fane,
Daughters of Night, remove your virgin train:
With festal pomp, and solemn tread,
Reverend your awe-commanding state we lead.
Breathing blessings o'er this land
Seek your ancient caves below,
Leading Fortune in your hand,
Breathing blessings as you go.
For you the altars rise, the victims bleed,
And sacred honours are decreed;
For you the rich libations dew the ground,
Whilst torches spread their blaze around.
Go, in your glory then rejoicing go;
Go, and lead the Fates along,
Joining in this votive song;
Whilst on this city from his throne on high
Jove propitious bends his eye.
Go then; and as you move your friendly train,
Responsive to this warbled strain
Harmonious bid your swelling voices flow.

THE PERSIANS.

THE PERSIANS.

No representation can be conceived more agreeable to a brave and free people, than that which sets before their eyes the ruin of an invading tyrant defeated by their own valour; and no poet could ever claim the right of making such representation with so good a grace as Æschylus, who had borne a distinguished part in the real scene. Animated by his noble subject, and the enthusiasm with which he loved his country, he has here displayed all the warmth and dignity of his genius, but tempered at the same time with so chastised a judgement, that we are surprised to see the infant drama come forth at once with all those graces which constitute its perfection: it is like his own Minerva, that sprung from the head of Jupiter,

Then shining heav'nly fair, a goddess arm'd.

Beside this wonderful management of the parts, the poet has the delicacy to set the glory of his

countrymen in the brightest view, by putting their praises into the mouths of their enemies. Not satisfied with a spirited narration of their defeat, and a recital of the many royal chiefs that perished in that battle; not satisfied with spreading the terror through all the realms of Persia, and placing them in a manner before our eyes in all the distress of desolation and despair, he hath interested even the dead, and, with the awful solemnity of a religious incantation, evoked the ghost of Darius to testify to his Persians that no safety, no hope remained to them, if they continued their hostile attempts against Greece; so that this sublime conception hath engaged Earth and Sea, Heaven and Hell, to bear honourable testimony to the glory of his countrymen, and the superiority of their arms.

This tragedy was exhibited eight years after the defeat at Salamis, whilst the memory of each circumstance was yet recent; so that we may consider the narration as a faithful history of this great event. The war was not yet ended, though the Persian monarch had offered to make the most humiliating concessions, and the Athenians were inclined to accept them; but Themistocles opposed the peace. So that we are further to consider this play in a political light; the poet, by so animated a description of the pernicious effects of an obstinate pride, and by filling the spectators with a malignant compassion for the vanquished Xerxes,

indirectly undisposing his countrymen to a continuation of the war. Thus every thing at Athens, even their shows, had a respect to the public good. This is the fine remark of P. Brumoy.

The scene of this tragedy is at Susa, before the ancient structure appropriated to the great council of state, and near the tomb of Darius.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ATOSSA.

MESSENGER.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

XERXES.

CHORUS, THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

THE PERSIANS(1).

CHORUS.

WHILST o'er the fields of Greece the embattled troops
Of Persia march, with delegated sway
We o'er their rich and gold-abounding seats
Hold faithful our firm guard; to this high charge

(1) Darius, king of Persia, having demanded the daughter of Jancyrus, king of the European Scythians, in marriage, and not obtaining the lady, was so highly offended that he marched with a great army to revenge the affront; but succeeding ill against the Scythians, on his return he sent Datis and Artaphernes with an army of two hundred thousand foot, and ten thousand horse, to subdue Greece; they had advanced within ten miles of Athens, which had particularly displeased the Great King, when Miltiades, at the head of nine thousand Athenians, and one thousand Platæans, met them in the plains of Marathon, and gave them battle. Datis drew one hundred thousand foot, and all his horse, into the field; but the Persians were totally defeated, and fled to their ships with great precipitation. To revenge this disgrace Xerxes, the son of Darius, invaded Greece in person, with one thousand two hundred ships of war, and two thousand transports; his land forces consisting of seven hundred thousand foot, and four hundred thousand horse: these, with the retinue of women and servants, that attended the Asiatic princes in their military expeditions, amounted to more than five millions. Xerxes, having forced the pass of Thermopylæ, marched into Attica, which he wasted, and finding Athens deserted, set it on fire. The Grecians had retired with all their effects to Trœzene and Salamis; here Themistocles with three hundred ships destroyed the Persian fleet; their supplies of provision being hereby cut off, the land forces attempted to make their retreat through Bœotia and Thessaly to Thrace, but most of them perished by the sword, famine, and pestilence. The battle of Platæa, cut off the remains of this for-

Xerxes, our royal lord, th' imperial son
Of great Darius, chose our honour'd age.
But for the king's return, and his arm'd host
Blazing with gold, my soul presaging ill
Swells in my tortur'd breast: for all her force
Hath Asia sent, and for her youth I sigh.
Nor messenger arrives, nor horseman speeds
With tidings to this seat of Persia's kings.
The gates of Susa and Ecbatana
Pour'd forth their martial trains; and Cissia sees
Her ancient tow'rs forsaken, whilst her youth,
Some on the bounding steed, the tall bark some
Ascending, some with painful march on foot,
Haste on, t' arrange the deep'ning files of war.
Amistres, Artaphernes, and the might

midable armament, and secured the liberty of Greece. Such is the noble subject of this tragedy. For this account *we* have the testimonies of Herodotus, Isocrates, Diodorus the Sicilian, Plutarch, Cicero, Justin, Nepos, and others: yet a late ingenious writer has undertaken, from the silence of the Persian history, to disprove them all: "can any man, who has made the least observation on "history (he asks), suppose for a moment that such myriads could by any means "have been maintained in one collected body?"—History tells us, that they perished chiefly through famine, and its attendant the pestilence. He says "the "destruction of such a number would have convulsed the whole of Asia had it "been united under one empire: could it possibly have been unfelt in Persia?" —Was it not severely felt? He thinks, that "the States of Greece appear in "reality, with regard to the Persians, to have been too far removed from that "degree of importance, which could hold them up as objects of such high ambition, or of such mighty resentment. These famous invasions have, therefore, "an appearance of being simply the movements of the governors of Asia Minor, "to regulate or enforce a tribute which the Greeks might frequently be willing "to neglect. Marathon, Salamis, and other celebrated battles, *may* indeed have "been real events; and the Grecian writers, to dignify their country, *may* have "turned hyperbole into historic fact, and swelled the thousands of the Persian "Satrap into the millions of the Persian king."—RICHARDSON'S DISSERTATION. —But this disregard to the evidence of Grecian antiquity, is only to prepare us for the reception of his Persian antiquity: yet could this very sensible writer see and lament in other cases, that "attachment to system has heaped "error upon error, and raised splendid fabrics upon pillars of ice."

Of great Astaspes, Megabazes bold,
Chieftains of Persia, kings, that to the power
Of the great king obedient, march with these
Leading their martial thousands; their proud steeds
Prance under them; steel bows and shafts their arms,
Dreadful to see, and terrible in fight,
Deliberate valour breathing in their souls.
Artembares, that in his fiery horse
Delights; Masistres; and Imæus bold,
Bending with manly strength his stubborn bow;
Pharandaces, and Sosthanes, that drives
With military pomp his rapid steeds.
Others the vast prolific Nile hath sent;
Pegastagon, that from Ægyptus draws
His high birth; Susiscanes; and the chief
That reigns o'er sacred Memphis, great Arsames;
And Ariomardus, that o'er ancient Thebes
Bears the supreme dominion; and with these
Drawn from their wat'ry marshes numbers train'd
To the stout oar. Next these the Lycian troops,
Soft sons of luxury; and those that dwell
Amidst the inland forests, from the sea
Far distant; these Metragathes commands,
And virtuous Arceus, royal chiefs, that shine
In burnish'd gold, and many' a whirling car
Drawn by six generous steeds from Sardis lead,
A glorious, and a dreadful spectacle.
And from the foot of Tmolus, sacred mount,
Eager to bind on Greece the servile yoke,
Mardon and Tharybis the massy spear
Grasp with unwearied vigour; the light lance
The Mysians shake. A mingled multitude
Swept from her wide dominions, skill'd to draw

Th' unerring bow, in ships Euphrates sends
From golden Babylon. With falchions arm'd
From all th' extent of Asia move the hosts
Obedient to their monarch's stern command.
Thus march'd the flow'r of Persia, whose lov'd youth
The world of Asia nourish'd, and with sighs
Laments their absence; many' an anxious look
Their wives, their parents send, count the slow days,
And tremble at the long-protracted time

STROPHE 1.

Already o'er the adverse strand
In arms the monarch's martial squadrons spread;
The threat'ning ruin shakes the land,
And each tall city bows its tow'red head.
Bark bound to bark, their wondrous way
They bridge across th' indignant sea;
The narrow Hellespont's vex'd waves disdain,
His proud neck taught to wear the chain.
Now has the peopled Asia's warlike lord,
By land, by sea, with foot, with horse,
Resistless in his rapid course,
O'er all their realms his warring thousands pour'd;
Now his intrepid chiefs surveys,
And glitt'ring like a god his radiant state displays.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Fierce as the dragon scal'd in gold
Through the deep files he darts his glowing eye;
And pleas'd their order to behold,
His gorgeous standard blazing to the sky,
Rolls onward his Assyrian car,
Directs the thunder of the war,
Bids the wing'd arrows' iron storm advance,
Against the slow and cumbrous lance.

What shall withstand the torrent of his sway,
When dreadful o'er the yielding shores
Th' impetuous tide of battle roars,
And sweeps the weak-opposing mounds away?
So Persia with resistless might
Roll'd her unnumber'd hosts of heroes to the fight.

STROPHE 2.

For when Misfortune's fraudful hand
Prepares to pour the vengeance of the sky,
What mortal shall her force withstand,
What rapid speed th' impending fury fly?
Gentle at first with flatt'ring smiles
She spreads her soft enchanting wiles,
So to her toils allures her destin'd prey,
Whence man ne'er breaks unhurt away.
For thus from ancient times the Fates ordain,
That Persia's sons should greatly dare,
Unequall'd in the works of war:
Shake with their thund'ring steeds th' ensanguin'd plain,
Dreadful the hostile walls surround,
And lay their rampir'd tow'rs in ruins on the ground.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Taught to behold with fearless eyes,
The whitening billows foam beneath the gale,
They bid the naval forests rise,
Mount the slight bark, unfurl the flying sail,
And o'er the angry ocean bear
To distant realms the storm of war.
For this with many' a sad and gloomy thought
My tortur'd breast is fraught:
Ah me! for Persia's absent sons I sigh;
For whilst in foreign fields they fight,
Our towns expos'd to wild affright

An easy prey to the invader lie:
Where, mighty Susa, where thy powers,
To wield the warrior's arms, and guard my regal tow'rs?

EPODE.

Crush'd beneath th' assailing foe
Her golden head must Cissia bend;
Whilst her pale virgins, frantic with despair,
Through all her streets awake the voice of wo;
And flying with their bosoms bare,
Their purfled stoles in anguish rend:
For all her youth in martial pride,
Like bees that, clust'ring round their king,
Their dark-embodied squadrons bring,
Attend their sceptred monarch's side,
And stretch across the wat'ry way
From shore to shore their long array.
The Persian dames with many' a tender fear
In grief's sad vigils keep the midnight hour;
Shed on the widow'd couch the streaming tear,
And the long absence of their loves deplore.
Each lonely matron feels her pensive breast
Throb with desire, with aching fondness glow,
Since in bright arms her daring warrior drest
Left her to languish in her love-lorn wo.

CHORUS.

Now ye grave Persians, that your honour'd seats
Hold in this ancient house, with prudent care
And deep deliberation, so the state
Requires, consult we, pond'ring the event
Of this great war, which our imperial lord,
The mighty Xerxes from Darius sprung,
The stream of whose rich blood flows in our veins,
Leads against Greece; whether his arrowy show'

Shot from the strong-braced bow, or the huge spear
High brandish'd, in the deathful field prevails.
But see, the monarch's mother: like the gods
Her lustre blazes on our eyes: My queen,
Prostrate I fall before her (2): all advance
With reverence, and in duteous phrase address her.

WHOLE CHORUS.

Hail queen, of Persia's high-zoned dames supreme,
Age-honour'd mother of the potent Xerxes,
Imperial consort of Darius, hail!
The wife, the mother of the Persian's god,
If yet our former glories fade not from us.

ATOSSA.

And therefore am I come, leaving my house
That shines with gorgeous ornaments and gold,
Where in past days Darius held with me
His royal residence. With anxious care
My heart is tortur'd: I will tell you, friends,
My thoughts, not otherwise devoid of fear,
Lest mighty wealth with haughty foot o'erturn
And trample in the dust that happiness,
Which, not unbless'd by Heav'n, Darius rais'd.
For this with double force unquiet thoughts
Past utterance fill my soul; that neither wealth
With all its golden stores, where men are wanting,
Claims reverence; nor the light, that beams from power,
Shines on the man, whom wealth disdains to grace.
The golden stores of wealth indeed are ours;
But for the light, such in the house I deem

(2) The Persians worshipped the Sun as the symbol of the Divine power: with the same prostrations they worshipped their kings, and even gave them the title of gods, as their majesty was the tutelary power of the empire.—HYDE, de Rel. Vet. Pers.

The presence of its lord, there I have fears.
Advise me then you, whose experienc'd age
Supports the state of Persia: prudence guides
Your councils, always kind and faithful to me.

CHORUS.

Speak, royal lady, what thy will, assur'd,
We want no second bidding, where our power
In word or deed waits on our zeal: our hearts
In this with honest duty shall obey thee.

ATOSSA.

Oft, since my son hath march'd his mighty host
Against th' Ionians, warring to subdue
Their country, have my slumbers been disturb'd
With dreams of dread portent; but most last night,
With marks of plainest proof. I'll tell thee then.
Methought two women stood before my eyes
Gorgeously vested, one in Persian robes
Adorn'd, the other in the Doric garb.
With more than mortal majesty they mov'd,
Of peerless beauty; sisters too they seem'd,
Though distant each from each they chanc'd to dwell,
In Greece the one, on the barbaric coast
The other. 'Twixt them soon dissention rose:
My son then hasted to compose their strife,
Sooth'd them to fair accord, beneath his car
Yokes them, and reins their harness'd necks. The one,
Exulting in her rich array, with pride
Arching her stately neck, obey'd the reins;
The other with indignant fury spurn'd
The car, and dash'd it piecemeal, rent the reins,
And tore the yoke asunder: down my son
Fell from the seat, and instant at his side
His father stands, Darius, at his fall

Impress'd with pity: him when Xerxes saw,
Glowing with grief and shame he rends his robes.
This was the dreadful vision of the night.
When I arose (3), in the sweet flowing stream
I bath'd my hands, and on the incens'd altars
Presenting my oblations to the gods
T' avert these ills, an eagle (4). I beheld
Fly to the altar of the Sun: aghast
I stood, my friends, and speechless; when a hawk
With eager speed runs thither, furious cuffs
The eagle with his wings, and with his talons
Unplumes his head; meantime th' imperial bird
Cow'rs to the blows defenceless. Dreadful this
To me that saw it, and to you that hear.
My son, let conquest crown his arms, would shine
With dazzling glory; but should fortune frown,
The state indeed presumes not to arraign
His sovereignty, yet how, his honour lost,
How shall he sway the sceptre of this land (5)?

(3) To expiate the ill-omened vision of the night: hence Persius,

Noctem flumine purgas.—STANLEY.

(4) As the Sun was peculiarly the deity of the Persians, and the eagle the emblem of royalty, this omen evidently points at Xerxes.

(5) The translation follows the correction of Pauw: Mr. Heath retains the common reading, and renders the passage thus, "If my son conquers, he will "be glorious; but if he be conquered, he is not accountable to the state, but will "rule the kingdom as usual." The spirit of Æschylus is not thus tame. That Atossa feared a revolt in the state, appears by her entreating the Chorus, the great council of Persia, to comfort her son at his return, and attend him to his house, Μὴ καί τι πρὸς κακοῖσι πρόσθηται κακόν; and by declaring, that she will not forsake in their afflictions those whom she holds most dear,

Οὐ γὰρ τὰ φίλτατ' ἐν κακοῖς προδώσομεν.—V. 853.

And that the Chorus had the same apprehensions is evident from the latter part of the next ode.

CHORUS.

We would not, royal lady, sink thy soul
With fear in the excess, nor raise it high
With confidence. Go then, address the gods;
If thou hast seen aught ill, entreat their power
T' avert that ill, and perfect ev'ry good
To thee, thy sons, the state, and all thy friends.
Then to the earth, and to the mighty dead
Behoves thee pour libations; gently call
Him that was once thy husband, whom thou saw'st
In visions of the night; entreat his shade
From the deep realms beneath to send to light
Triumph to thee, and to thy son; whate'er
Bears other import, to enwrap, to hide it
Close in the cov'ring earth's profoundest gloom.
This, in the presage of my thoughts that flow
Benevolent to thee, have I propos'd;
And all, we trust, shall be successful to thee.

ATOSSA.

Thy friendly judgement first hath plac'd these dreams
In a fair light, confirming the event
Benevolent to my son, and to my house.
May all the good be ratified! These rites
Shall, at thy bidding, to the Pow'rs of Heav'n,
And to the manes of our friends, be paid
In order meet, when I return: meanwhile
Indulge me, friends, who wish to be inform'd
Where, in what clime, the tow'rs of Athens rise.

CHORUS.

Far in the west, where sets th' imperial sun.

ATOSSA.

Yet my son will'd the conquest of this town.

CHORUS.

May Greece through all her states bend to his power.

ATOSSA.

Send they embattled numbers to the field?

CHORUS.

A force, that to the Medes hath wrought much wo.

ATOSSA.

Have they sufficient treasures in their houses?

CHORUS.

Their rich earth yields a copious fount of silver (6).

ATOSSA.

From the strong bow wing they the barbed shaft?

CHORUS.

They grasp the stout spear, and the massy shield.

ATOSSA.

What monarch reigns, whose power commands their ranks?

CHORUS.

Slaves to no lord, they own no kingly pow'r (7).

ATOSSA.

How can they then resist th' invading foe?

CHORUS.

As to spread havoc through the numerous host,
That round Darius form'd their glitt'ring files.

ATOSSA.

Thy words strike deep, and wound the parent's breast,
Whose sons are march'd to such a dangerous field.

(6) This alludes to their rich silver mines.

(7) This was the glory of the free states of Greece. The Persian monarch held all the subjects of his empire, of whatever rank or condition, as his slaves; he had indeed the gallantry to except his wife. Δίδωμι σοὶ ἐμαυτὸν δοῦλον καὶ σύμμαχον, I yield myself to thee as thy slave and assistant in the war, was the language of Gobryas when he surrendered to Cyrus. This was the servile yoke which Xerxes wished to bind on Greece; to repel which they exerted themselves thus gloriously.—STANLEY.

CHORUS.

But, if I judge aright, thou soon shalt hear
Each circumstance; for this way, mark him, speeds
A Persian messenger: he bears, be sure,
Tidings of high import, or good or ill.

ATOSSA, CHORUS, MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

Wo to the towns through Asia's peopled realms!
Wo to the land of Persia, once the port
Of boundless wealth, how is thy glorious state
Vanish'd at once, and all thy spreading honours
Fall'n, lost! Ah me! unhappy is his task
That bears unhappy tidings: but constraint
Compels me to relate this tale of wo.
Persians, the whole barbaric host is fall'n.

CHORUS.

O horror, horror! What a baleful train
Of recent ills! Ah Persians, as he speaks
Of ruin, let your tears stream to the earth.

MESSENGER.

It is ev'n so, all ruin; and myself,
Beyond all hope returning, view this light.

CHORUS.

How tedious and oppressive is the weight
Of age, reserv'd to hear these hopeless ills!

MESSENGER.

I speak not from report; but these mine eyes
Beheld the ruin which my tongue would utter.

CHORUS.

Wo, wo is me! Then has the iron storm,
That darken'd from the realms of Asia, pour'd
In vain its arrowy show'r on sacred Greece.

MESSENGER.

In heaps th' unhappy dead lie on the strand
Of Salamis, and all the neighbouring shores.

CHORUS.

Unhappy friends, sunk, perish'd in the sea;
Their bodies, 'midst the wreck of shatter'd ships,
Mangled, and rolling on th' encumber'd waves!

MESSENGER.

Nought did their bows avail, but all the troops
In the first conflict of the ships were lost.

CHORUS.

Raise the funereal cry, with dismal notes
Wailing the wretched Persians. Oh, how ill
They plann'd their measures, all their army perish'd!

MESSENGER.

O Salamis, how hateful is thy name!
And groans burst from me when I think of Athens.

CHORUS.

How dreadful to her foes! Call to remembrance
How many Persian dames, wedded in vain,
Hath Athens of their noble husbands widow'd!

ATOSSA.

Astonied with these ills, my voice thus long
Hath wanted utterance: griefs like these exceed
The power of speech, or question: yet ev'n such,
Inflicted by the gods, must mortal man
Constrain'd by hard necessity endure.
But tell me all, without distraction tell me,
All this calamity, though many' a groan
Burst from thy labouring heart. Who is not fallen!

What leader must we wail? What sceptred chief
Dying hath left his troops without a lord (8)?

MESSENGER.

Xerxes himself lives, and beholds the light.

ATOSSA.

That word beams comfort on my house, a ray
That brightens through the melancholy gloom.

MESSENGER.

Artembares, the potent chief that led
Ten thousand horse, lies slaughter'd on the rocks
Of rough Sileniæ. The great Dadaces,
Beneath whose standard march'd a thousand horse,
Pierc'd by a spear fell headlong from the ship.
Tenagon, bravest of the Bactrians, lies
Roll'd on the wave-worn beach of Ajax' isle (9).
Lilæus, Arsames, Argestes dash
With violence in death against the rocks
Where nest the silver doves (10). Arcteus, that dwelt

(8) Atossa with great delicacy inquires in general,

What sceptred chief
Dying hath left his troops without a lord?

Though her particular anxiety was for her son: thus the messenger understands her; and, having assured her of the safety of Xerxes, proceeds without further question to inform her what sceptred chiefs had perished. Mr. Heath destroys this propriety, and the whole sense of the context, by the idea which he has affixed to the words ἄναυδρον τάξιν, and for which he has no warrant from Æschylus: would he carry the same idea to the εὐνιδας ἀνάνδρους of v. 289?

(9) Salamis was the birth-place of Ajax; so that hero boasts in the seventh Iliad,

From warlike Salamis I drew my birth;

So Horace of his brother,

Teucer Salamina, patremque,
Cum fugeret.

(10) Salamis was sacred to Venus; hence it abounded with doves.

Near to the fountains of the Ægyptian Nile,
Adeues, and Pheresba, and Pharnuchus,
Fell from one ship. Matallus, Chrysa's chief,
That led his dark'ning squadrons, thrice ten thousand,
On jet-black steeds (11), with purple gore distain'd
The yellow of his thick and shaggy beard.
The Magian Arabus, and Artames
From Bactra, mould'ring on the dreary shore,
Lie low. Amistris, and Amphistreus there
Grasps his war-wearied spear; there prostrate lies
Th' illustrious Ariomardus; long his loss
Shall Sardis weep: the Mysian Sisames,
And Tharybis, that o'er the burden'd deep
Led five times fifty vessels; Lerna gave
The hero birth, and manly grace adorn'd
His pleasing form, but low in death he lies
Unhappy in his fate. Syennesis,
Cilicia's warlike chief, who dared to front
The foremost dangers, singly to the foes
A terror, there too found a glorious death.
These chieftains to my sad remembrance rise,
Relating but a few of many ills.

ATOSSA.

This is the height of ill, ah me! and shame
To Persia, grief, and lamentation loud.
But tell me this, afresh renew thy tale,
What was the number of the Grecian fleet,
That in fierce conflict their bold barks should dare
Rush to encounter with the Persian hosts.

MESSENGER.

Know then, in numbers the barbaric fleet

(11) Æschylus never loads his verse with unmeaning epithets; the colour of these horses is particularly marked; it is not easy to assign the reason.

Was far superior: in ten squadrons, each
Of thirty ships, Greece plough'd the deep; of these
One held a distant station. Xerxes led
A thousand ships; their number well I know;
Two hundred more, and seven, that swept the seas
With speediest sail: this was their full amount.
And in th' engagement seem'd we not secure
Of victory? But unequal fortune sunk
Our scale in fight, discomfiting our host.

ATOSSA.

The gods preserve the city of Minerva.

MESSENGER.

The walls of Athens are impregnable,
Their firmest bulwarks her heroic sons.

ATOSSA.

Which navy first advanc'd to the attack?
Who led to th' onset, tell me; the bold Greeks,
Or, glorying in his numerous fleet, my son?

MESSENGER.

Our evil genius, lady, or some god
Hostile to Persia, led to ev'ry ill.
Forth from the troops of Athens came a Greek,
And thus address'd thy son, th' imperial Xerxes,
" Soon as the shades of night descend (12), the Grecians
" Shall quit their station; rushing to their oars

(12) C. Nepos tells us from Herodotus, that the commanders of the Grecian fleet, terrified with the destruction of Athens, agreed to return home to defend their own states: this must have been a ruinous measure, as, had they separated, they would have been easily crushed. Themistocles alone opposed it; but his remonstrance had little weight with Eurybiades, the king of Sparta, who then commanded in chief: he therefore formed his plan, that they might all be obliged to fight, however contrary to their judgement it succeeded. Thus Xerxes, says the historian, was conquered by the measures of Themistocles, rather than by the arms of Greece.

" They mean to separate, and in secret flight
" Seek safety." At these words the royal chief,
Little conceiving of the wiles of Greece
And gods averse, to all the naval leaders
Gave his high charge: " Soon as yon sun shall cease
" To dart his radiant beams, and dark'ning night
" Ascends the temple of the sky (13), arrange
" In three divisions your well-order'd ships,
" And guard each pass, each out-let of the seas:
" Others enring around this rocky isle
" Of Salamis: should Greece escape her fate,
" And work her way by secret flight, your heads
" Shall answer the neglect." This harsh command
He gave, exulting in his mind, nor knew
What Fate design'd. With martial discipline
And prompt obedience, snatching a repast,
Each mariner fix'd well his ready oar.
Soon as the golden sun was set, and night
Advanc'd, each train'd to ply the dashing oar
Assum'd his seat; in arms each warrior stood,
Troop cheering troop through all the ships of war.
Each to th' appointed station steers his course;
And through the night his naval force each chief
Fix'd to secure the passes. Night advanc'd,
But not by secret flight did Greece attempt
T' escape. The morn, all beauteous to behold,
Drawn by white steeds bounds o'er th' enlighten'd earth;
At once from ev'ry Greek with glad acclaim
Burst forth the song of war, whose lofty notes

(13) As the Sun was peculiarly worshipped by the Persians, Xerxes with great propriety and beauty calls his place in the Heavens, " The Temple of the " Sky."

The echo of the island rocks return'd,
Spreading dismay through Persia's hosts thus fallen
From their high hopes; no flight this solemn strain
Portended, but deliberate valour bent
On daring battle; whilst the trumpet's sound
Kindled the flames of war. But when their oars,
The Pæan ended, with impetuous fo[illegible]
Dash'd the resounding surges, instant all
Rush'd on in view; in orderly array
The squadron on the right first led, behind
Rode their whole fleet; and now distinct we heard
From ev'ry part this voice of exhortation:
" Advance, ye sons of Greece, from thraldom save
" Your country, save your wives, your children save,
" The temples of your gods, the sacred tomb
" Where rest your honour'd ancestors; this day
" The common cause of all demands your valour."
Meantime from Persia's hosts the deep'ning shout
Answer'd their shout; no time for cold delay;
But ship 'gainst ship its brazen beak impell'd.
First to the charge a Grecian galley rush'd;
Ill the Phœnician bore the rough attack,
Its sculptur'd prow all shatter'd. Each advanc'd
Daring an opposite. The deep array
Of Persia at the first sustain'd th' encounter;
But their throng'd numbers, in the narrow seas
Confin'd, want room for action; and depriv'd
Of mutual aid beaks clash with beaks, and each
Breaks all the other's oars: with skill dispos'd
The Grecian navy circled them around
With fierce assault; and rushing from its height
Th' inverted vessel sinks: the sea no more
Wears its accustom'd aspect, with foul wrecks

And blood disfigur'd; floating carcasses
Roll on the rocky shores: the poor remains
Of the barbaric armament to flight
Ply ev'ry oar inglorious: onward rush
The Greeks amidst the ruins of the fleet,
As through a shoal of fish caught in a net,
Spreading destruction: the wide ocean o'er
Wailings are heard, and loud laments, till night
With darkness on her brow brought grateful truce.
Should I recount each circumstance of wo,
Ten times on my unfinish'd tale the sun
Would set; for be assur'd that not one day
Could close the ruin of so vast an host.

ATOSSA.

Ah, what a boundless sea of wo hath burst
On Persia, and the whole barbaric race!

MESSENGER.

These are not half, not half our ills; on these
Came an assemblage of calamities,
That sunk us with a double weight of wo.

ATOSSA.

What fortune can be more unfriendly to us
Than this? Say on, what dread calamity
Sunk Persia's host with greater weight of wo.

MESSENGER.

Whoe'er of Persia's warriors glow'd in prime
Of vig'rous youth, or felt their generous souls
Expand with courage, or for noble birth
Shone with distinguish'd lustre, or excell'd
In firm and duteous loyalty, all these
Are fall'n, ignobly, miserably fall'n.

ATOSSA.

Alas their ruthless fate, unhappy friends!
But in what manner, tell me, did they perish?

MESSENGER.

Full against Salamis an isle arises (14)
Of small circumference, to th' anchor'd bark
Unfaithful; on the promontory's brow
That overlooks the sea, Pan loves to lead
The dance: to this the monarch sends these chiefs,
That when the Grecians from their shatter'd ships
Should here seek shelter, these might hew them down
An easy conquest, and secure the strand
To their sea-wearied friends; ill judging what
Th' event: but when the fav'ring god to Greece
Gave the proud glory of this naval fight,
Instant in all their glitt'ring arms they leap'd
From their light ships, and all the island round
Encompass'd, that our bravest stood dismay'd;
Whilst broken rocks whirl'd with tempestuous force,
And storms of arrows crush'd them; then the Greeks
Rush to th' attack at once, and furious spread
The carnage, till each mangled Persian fell.
Deep were the groans of Xerxes, when he saw
This havoc (15); for his seat, a lofty mound
Commanding the wide sea, o'erlooked his hosts.
With rueful cries he rent his royal robes,

(14) Psyttaleia, a rough uncultivated rock between Salamis and the continent. Pan is always represented as delighting in such places,

Καὶ κορυφὰς ὀρέων, καὶ πετρήεντα κάρηνα.—STANLEY.

(15) Xerxes viewed this fight from Ægialus, a mountain on the opposite shore: the silver chair, on which he sat, was afterwards placed in the temple of Minerva in Athens, and dedicated to that goddess, as was the golden-hilted cimetar of Mardonius.

And through his troops embattled on the shore
Gave signal of retreat; then started wild,
And fled disorder'd. To the former ills
These are fresh miseries to awake thy sighs.

ATOSSA.

Invidious Fortune, how thy baleful pow'r
Hath sunk the hopes of Persia! Bitter fruit
My son hath tasted from his purpos'd vengeance
On Athens fam'd for arms; the fatal field
Of Marathon, red with barbaric blood,
Suffic'd not; that defeat he thought t' avenge,
And pull'd this hideous ruin on his head.
But tell me, if thou canst, where didst thou leave
The ships, that happily escap'd the wreck?

MESSENGER.

The poor remains of Persia's scatter'd fleet
Spread ev'ry sail for flight, as the wind drives,
In wild disorder. And on land no less
The ruin'd army; in Bœotia some,
With thirst oppress'd, at Crene's cheerful rills
Were lost; forespent with breathless speed some pass
The fields of Phocis, some the Doric plain,
And near the gulf of Melia, the rich vale
Through which Sperchius rolls his friendly stream.
Achaia thence and the Thessalian state
Receiv'd our famish'd train; the greater part
Through thirst and hunger perish'd there, oppress'd
At once by both: but we our painful steps
Held onwards to Magnesia, and the land
Of Macedonia, o'er the ford of Axius,
And Bolbe's sedgy marches, and the heights
Of steep Pangæos, to the realms of Thrace.

That night, ere yet the season, breathing frore (16)
Rush'd winter, and with ice encrusted o'er
The flood of sacred Strymon: such as own'd
No God till now, awe-struck, with many' a prayer
Ador'd the earth and sky. When now the troops
Had ceas'd their invocations to the gods,
O'er the stream's solid crystal they began
Their march; and we, who took our early way
Ere the sun darted his warm beams, pass'd safe:
But when his burning orb with fiery rays
Unbound the middle current, down they sunk
Each over other; happiest he who found
The speediest death; the poor remains that 'scap'd,
With pain through Thrace dragg'd on their toilsome march,
A feeble few, and reach'd their native soil;
That Persia sighs through all her states, and mourns
Her dearest youth. This is no feigned tale;
But many of the ills, that burst upon us
In dreadful vengeance, I refrain to utter.

CHORUS.

O Fortune, heavy with affliction's load,
How hath thy foot crush'd all the Persian race!

(16) The battle of Salamis was fought on the 20th of the month Boedromion, which answers to September; no wonder then that this early frost appeared miraculous to the Persians. Æschylus observes propriety of manners in representing them as adoring the earth and sky; the Greek writers are unanimous in their relation, that the ancient Persians worshipped the elements, as the prima omnium rerum semina; Fire, as derived from the Sun; the Air, or the wide circumference of the sky, which they esteemed to be Jupiter; the Earth, and Water. Hyde, a zealous advocate for the orthodoxy of Magism, cries out, Bone deus, quanta sunt hæc mendacia! The fact, however, is incontestable; and whether the adoration was religious or civil, real or emblematical, was of no concern to the Athenian poet, though of much to the Christian divine. Ipse viderit.

ATOSSA.

Ah me, what sorrows for our ruin'd host
Oppress my soul! Ye visions of the night
Haunting my dreams, how plainly did you show
These ills!—You set them in too fair a light.
Yet, since your bidding hath in this prevail'd,
First to the Gods wish I to pour my prayers,
Then to the mighty dead present my off'rings,
Bringing libations from my house: too late,
I know, to change the past; yet for the future,
If haply better fortune may await it.
Behoves you, on this sad event, to guide
Your friends with faithful counsels. Should my son
Return ere I have finish'd, let your voice
Speak comfort to him; friendly to his house
Attend him, nor let sorrow rise on sorrows.

STROPHE.

Awful sovereign of the skies,
When now o'er Persia's numerous host
Thou bad'st the storm with ruin rise,
All her proud vaunts of glory lost,
Ecbatana's imperial head
By thee was wrapt in sorrow's dark'ning shade;
Through Susa's palaces with loud lament,
By their soft hands their veils all rent,
The copious tear the virgins pour,
That trickles their bare bosoms o'er.
From her sweet couch up starts the widow'd bride,
Her lord's lov'd image rushing on her soul,
Throws the rich ornaments of youth aside,
And gives her griefs to flow without control:
Her griefs not causeless; for the mighty slain
Our melting tears demand, and sorrow-soften'd strain.

ANTISTROPHE.

Now her wailings wide despair
Pours these exhausted regions o'er;
Xerxes, ill-fated, led the war;
Xerxes, ill-fated, leads no more;
Xerxes sent forth th' unwise command,
The crowded ships unpeopled all the land;
That land, o'er which Darius held his reign,
Courting the arts of peace, in vain,
O'er all his grateful realms ador'd,
The stately Susa's gentle lord.
Black o'er the waves his burden'd vessels sweep,
For Greece elate the warlike squadrons fly;
Now crush'd and whelm'd beneath th' indignant deep
The shatter'd wrecks and lifeless heroes lie:
Whilst, from the arms of Greece escap'd, with toil
Th' unshelter'd monarch roams o'er Thracia's dreary soil.

EPODE.

The first in battle slain
By Cychrea's craggy shore
Through sad constraint, ah me! forsaken lie,
All pale and smear'd with gore;—
Raise high the mournful strain,
And let the voice of anguish pierce the sky:—
Or roll beneath the roaring tide,
By monsters rent of touch abhorr'd;
Whilst through the widow'd mansion echoing wide
Sounds the deep groan, and wails its slaughter'd lord:
Pale with his fears the helpless orphan there
Gives the full stream of plaintive grief to flow;
Whilst age its hoary head in deep despair
Bends, list'ning to the shrieks of wo.

With sacred awe
The Persian law
No more shall Asia's realms revere;
To their lord's hand,
At his command,
No more th' exacted tribute bear.
Who now falls prostrate at the monarch's throne?
His regal greatness is no more.
Now no restraint the wanton tongue shall own,
Free from the golden curb of power;
For on the rocks, wash'd by the beating flood,
His awe-commanding nobles lie in blood.

ATOSSA, CHORUS.

ATOSSA.

Whoe'er, my friends, in the rough stream of life
Hath struggled with affliction, thence is taught
That, when the flood begins to swell, the heart
Fondly fears all things: when the fav'ring gale
Of fortune smooths the current, it expands
With unsuspecting confidence, and deems
That gale shall always breathe. So to my eyes
All things now wear a formidable shape,
And threaten from the gods: my ears are pierc'd
With sounds far other than of song. Such ills
Dismay my sick'ning soul: hence from my house
Nor glitt'ring car attends me, nor the train
Of wonted state, whilst I return, and bear
Libations soothing to the father's shade
In the son's cause; delicious milk, that foams
White from the sacred heifer: liquid honey,

Extract of flowers; and from its virgin fount (17)
The running crystal; this pure draught, that flow'd
From th' ancient vine, of power to bathe the spirits
In joy; the yellow olive's fragrant fruit,
That glories in its leaves' unfading verdure;
With flow'rs of various hues, earth's fairest offspring,
Inwreath'd. But you, my friends, amidst these rites
Raise high your solemn warblings (18), and invoke
Your lord, divine Darius: I meanwhile
Will pour these off'rings to th' infernal gods.

CHORUS.

Yes, royal lady, Persia's honour'd grace,
To earth's dark chambers pour thy off'rings: we
With choral hymns will supplicate the powers
That guide the dead, to be propitious to us.
And you, that o'er the realms of night extend
Your sacred sway, the mighty earth, and thee

(17) The Persians endeavoured to preserve the virgin purity of water with the most religious attention, esteeming *that* and fire, in this pure state, to be the only images of the divine nature in this world; with this view guards were assigned to the fountains and rivers; and it was the highest crime to defile water, insomuch that Tiridates, when he was going to Nero, refused to sail, because he held it unlawful to pollute the sea: navigare noluit, quia expuere in maria, aliisque mortalium necessitatibus violare naturam eam fas non putavit. Pliny.

HYDE, p. 138.

(18) After these libations it was usual to address the dead with a solemn hymn: thus Electra in the Choephoræ, having poured the oblations at the tomb of her father, bids the Chorus

Attune the Pæan,
And sooth his shade with solemn harmony.

But here it was of absolute necessity, as a *charm* to evoke the dead, ὕμνος ψυχαγωγὸς. The Persians were greatly addicted to (what we call) magical incantations, which probably they learned from the conquered Chaldæans; so that nothing, as Stanley well observes, could be more in character than these rites, this νεκυομαντεία.

Hermes; thee chief, tremendous king, whose throne
Awes with supreme dominion, I adjure:
Send, from your gloomy regions, send his shade
Once more to visit this ethereal light;
That he alone, if aught of dread event
He sees yet threat'ning Persia, may disclose
To us poor mortals Fate's extreme decree.

Hears the honour'd godlike king?
These barbaric notes of wo,
Taught in descant sad to ring,
Hears he in the shades below?
Thou, O Earth, and you, that lead
Through your sable realms the dead,
Guide him as he takes his way,
And give him to th' ethereal light of day!

Let th' illustrious shade arise
Glorious in his radiant state,
More than blaz'd before our eyes,
Ere sad Susa mourn'd his fate.
Dear he liv'd, his tomb is dear,
Shining virtues we revere:
Send then, monarch of the dead,
Such as Darius was, Darius' shade.

He in realm-unpeopling war
Wasted not his subjects' blood,
Godlike in his will to spare,
In his councils wise and good.
Rise then, sovereign lord, to light;
On this mound's sepulchral height

Lift thy sock in saffron dyed,
And rear thy rich tiara's regal pride!

Great and good, Darius, rise:
Lord of Persia's lord, appear:
Thus invok'd with thrilling cries
Come, our tale of sorrow hear!
Wo her Stygian pennons spreads,
Brooding darkness o'er our heads;
For stretch'd along the dreary shore
The flower of Asia lies distain'd with gore.

Rise, Darius, awful power;
Long for thee our tears shall flow.
Why thy ruin'd empire o'er
Swells this double flood of wo?
Sweeping o'er the azure tide
Rode thy navy's gallant pride;
Navy now no more, for all
Beneath the whelming wave——

GHOST OF DARIUS, ATOSSA, CHORUS.

DARIUS.

Ye faithful Persians (19), honour'd now in age,
Once the companions of my youth, what ills

(19) The Ghost of Darius here rises suddenly, and interrupts the unfinished hymn. The appearance of this royal shade, the servile prostration of the affrighted satraps, the grief and the tears of Atossa, present us with one of the finest subjects for picture, that ever employed the pencil of a painter; indeed Æschylus abounds with pittoresque images, arising from the most vivid imagination, marked with the most precise expression. The excellent Mr. Romney gave a strong instance of his good sense and fine taste, when he called Æschylus "the "painter's poet:" the public may expect to see this scene, and some others, de-

Afflict the state? The firm earth groans, it opes,
Disclosing its vast deeps; and near my tomb
I see my wife: this shakes my troubled soul
With fearful apprehensions; yet her off'rings
Pleas'd I receiv'd. And you around my tomb
Chanting the lofty strain, whose solemn air
Draws forth the dead, with grief-attemper'd notes
Mournfully call me: not with ease the way
Leads to this upper air; and the stern gods,
Prompt to admit, yield not a passage back
But with reluctance: much with them my power
Availing, with no tardy step I come.
Say then, with what new ill doth Persia groan?

CHORUS.

My wonted awe (20) o'ercomes me; in thy presence
I dare not raise my eyes, I dare not speak.

DARIUS.

Since from the realms below, by thy sad strains
Adjur'd, I come, speak, let thy words be brief,
Say whence thy grief, tell me unaw'd by fear.

CHORUS.

I dread to forge a flatt'ring tale, I dread
To grieve thee with a harsh offensive truth.

signed by him in the genuine spirit of Æschylus; so that the translator will have this merit, if he has no other, to have given rise to some paintings that will do honour to our country.

(20) Nothing could be more agreeable to the free republican spirit of the Athenians, than to see their proud invaders represented under this servile awe. The Persians, when they approached the royal presence, fell with their faces on the ground, and esteemed this one of their most honourable institutions, as in this adoration of their king, they adored the image of God the preserver of all things.—Plutarch in Themistocle.—But the Grecians had so great an abhorrence of this custom, that Conon, though sent to the Persian court by his friend Pharnabazus, and charged with a commission of the greatest consequence to the welfare of Greece, refused to be introduced to Artaxerxes, that he might not disgrace his country by complying with this barbaric mode.—Nepos.

DARIUS.

Since fear hath chain'd his tongue, high-honour'd dame,
Once my imperial consort, check thy tears,
Thy griefs; and speak distinctly. Mortal man
Must bear his lot of wo; afflictions rise
Many from sea, many from land, if life
Be haply measur'd through a length'ned course.

ATOSSA.

O thou, that graced with fortune's choicest gifts
Surpassing mortals, whilst thine eye beheld
Yon sun's ethereal rays, livedst like a god
Blest 'midst thy Persians; blest I deem thee now
In death, ere sunk in this abyss of ills;
Darius, hear at once our sum of wo,
Ruin through all her states hath crush'd thy Persia.

DARIUS.

By pestilence, or faction's furious storms?

ATOSSA.

Not so: near Athens perish'd all our troops.

DARIUS.

Say, of my sons which led the forces thither?

ATOSSA.

Th' impetuous Xerxes, thinning all the land.

DARIUS.

By sea or land dared he this rash attempt?

ATOSSA.

By both: a double front the war presented.

DARIUS.

A host so vast what march conducted o'er?

ATOSSA.

From shore to shore he bridg'd the Hellespont.

DARIUS.

What, could he chain the mighty Bosphorus?

ATOSSA.

Ev'n so, some god assisting his design.

DARIUS.

Some god of power to cloud his better sense.

ATOSSA.

Th' event now shows what mischiefs he achiev'd.

DARIUS.

What suffer'd they, for whom your sorrows flow?

ATOSSA.

His navy sunk spreads ruin through the camp.

DARIUS.

Fell all his host beneath the slaught'ring spear?

ATOSSA.

Susa, through all her streets, mourns her lost sons.

DARIUS.

How vain the succour, the defence of arms!

ATOSSA.

In Bactra age and grief are only left.

DARIUS.

Ah, what a train of warlike youth is lost!

ATOSSA.

Xerxes, astonish'd, desolate, alone——

DARIUS,

How will this end? Nay, pause not. Is he safe?

ATOSSA.

Fled o'er the bridge, that join'd the adverse strands.

DARIUS.

And reach'd this shore in safety? Is this true?

ATOSSA.

True are thy words, and not to be gainsaid.

DARIUS.

With what a winged course the oracles
Haste their completion! With the lightning's speed

Jove on my son hath hurl'd his threaten'd vengeance:
Yet I implor'd the gods that it might fall
In time's late process: but when rashness drives
Impetuous on, the scourge of Heav'n uprais'd
Lashes the fury forward; hence these ills
Pour headlong on my friends. Not weighing this,
My son, with all the fiery pride of youth,
Hath quicken'd their arrival, whilst he hoped
To bind the sacred Hellespont, to hold
The raging Bosphorus, like a slave, in chains (21).
And dared th' advent'rous passage, bridging firm
With links of solid iron his wondrous way,
To lead his numerous host; and, swell'd with thoughts
Presumptuous, deem'd, vain mortal, that his power
Should rise above the gods, and Neptune's might.
And was not this the phrensy of the soul?
But much I fear lest all my treasur'd wealth
Fall to some daring hand an easy prey.

ATOSSA.

This from too frequent converse with bad men
Th' impetuous Xerxes learn'd: these caught his ear
With thy great deeds, as winning for thy sons
Vast riches with thy conquering spear, whilst he
Tim'rous and slothful never, save in sport,
Lifted his lance, nor added to the wealth
Won by his noble fathers. This reproach,

(21) Authors have been careful enough to transmit to us an account of the intemperate pride of Xerxes. When the first bridge, which he formed over the Hellespont, was broken by the waves, he ordered the sea to be scourged for having dared to disobey his will, and threw chains into it, thereby signifying that he would bind it as his slave in fetters: but it has not been observed, that the peculiar aggravation of this arose from the impiety of it; for as the Persians revered water as particularly sacred, Xerxes by this presumptuous act assumed a superiority over the divinity of the sea.

Oft by bad men repeated, urged his soul
T' attempt this war, and lead his troops to Greece.

DARIUS.

Great deeds have they achiev'd, and memorable
For ages: never hath this wasted state
Suffer'd such ruin, since Heav'n's awful king
Gave to one lord Asia's extended plains
White with innumerous flocks, and to his hands
Consign'd th' imperial sceptre. Her brave hosts
A Mede first led (22). The virtues of his son
Fix'd firm the empire, for his temperate soul
Breath'd prudence. Cyrus next, by fortune grac'd,
Adorn'd the throne, and bless'd his grateful friends
With peace: he to his mighty monarchy
Join'd Lydia, and the Phrygians; to his power
Ionia bent reluctant; but the Gods
With victory his gentle virtues crown'd.
His son then wore the regal diadem.
Next, to disgrace his country, and to stain
The splendid glories of this ancient throne,
Rose Mardus: him with righteous vengeance fir'd
Artaphrenes, and his confederate chiefs,
Crush'd in his palace: Maraphis assum'd
The sceptre: after him Artaphrenes.
Me next to this exalted eminence,
Crowning my great ambition, fortune rais'd;
In many' a glorious field my glittering spear
Flamed in the van of Persia's numerous hosts;

(22) The English reader will be contented with this short account of the Persian monarchy as Æschylus hath given it: this was sufficient for his purpose. The excellent Stanley hath entered into a long disquisition; but as Pauw well observes, Ea non sunt hujus loci: this is rather the province of history than of a detached note.

But never wrought such ruin to the state.
Xerxes, my son, in all the pride of youth
Listens to youthful counsels, my commands
No more remember'd: hence, my hoary friends,
Not the whole line of Persia's sceptred lords,
You know it well, so wasted her brave sons.

CHORUS.

Why this(23)? To what fair end are these thy words
Directed? Sovereign lord, instruct thy Persians
How, 'midst this ruin, best to guide their state.

DARIUS.

No more 'gainst Greece lead your embattled hosts;
Not though your deep'ning phalanx spreads the field
Out-numb'ring theirs: their very earth fights for them.

CHORUS.

What may thy words import? How fight for them?

DARIUS.

With famine it destroys your cumbrous train.

CHORUS.

Choice levies, prompt for action, will we send.

DARIUS.

Those, in the fields of Greece that now remain,
Shall not revisit safe the Persian shore.

CHORUS.

What, shall not all the host of Persia pass
Again from Europe o'er the Hellespont?

(23) The Chorus had reason to ask this question, as the tendency of the speech of Darius is obscure enough: it means, that all the wars of all their former kings, and even his own, though the mention of Marathon is carefully avoided, were not so destructive to Persia as this expedition of Xerxes; therefore, if they regarded the welfare of their country, they must think no more of invading Greece.

DARIUS.

Of all their numbers few (24), if aught avails
The faith of heav'n-sent oracles to him
That weighs the past, in their accomplishment
Not partial: hence he left, in faithless hope
Confiding, his selected train of heroes.
These have their station where Asopus flows
Wat'ring the plain, whose grateful currents roll
Diffusing plenty through Bœotia's fields.
There misery waits to crush them with the load
Of heaviest ills, in vengeance for their proud
And impious daring; for where'er they held
Through Greece their march, they fear'd not to profane
The statues of the gods (25); their hallow'd shrines
Emblaz'd, o'erturn'd their altars, and in ruins,
Rent from their firm foundations, to the ground
Levell'd their temples: Such their frantic deeds,
Nor less their suff'rings: greater still await them;

(24) This is prophetically spoken of the battle of Platæa, which in the following year totally destroyed the remains of this mighty armament. The messenger could not relate this, nor the Chorus know it, as the event had not yet happened: but the shade of Darius having something of divinity, and observing that part of the oracles of the gods were already accomplished, could with confidence declare, that the other part must have its completion.—HEATH.—These oracles were mentioned before.

(25) The ancient Persians erected neither temples nor statues to their gods, because they did not think them endued with human forms, nor to be confined within walls, as to whom all things ought to be free and open: their sacrifices were performed on high places to Jupiter, or the circumference of the sky, to the sun and moon, to the earth, to fire, to water, and to the winds. Xerxes retained enough of this purer Sabaism, to demolish all the temples of Greece in his march; though Hyde, in commenting on this narration of Herodotus, informs us, that Persia at that time abounded with temples; hence Xerxes amidst his devastations, consistently enough with the principles and practice of his country, spared the temple of Apollo at Delos, and the temple of Diana at Ephesus, considering the one as consecrated to the sun, the other to the moon.

For vengeance hath not wasted all her stores,
The heap yet swells: for in Platæa's plains
Beneath the Doric spear the clotted mass
Of carnage shall arise, that the high mounds,
Piled o'er the dead, to late posterity
Shall give this silent record to men's eyes,
That proud aspiring thoughts but ill beseem
Weak mortals: for oppression, when it springs,
Puts forth the blade of vengeance, and its fruit
Yields a ripe harvest of repentant wo.
Behold this vengeance, and remember Greece,
Remember Athens (26): henceforth let not pride,
Her present state disdaining, strive to grasp
Another's, and her treasur'd happiness
Shed on the ground: such insolent attempts
Awake the vengeance of offended Jove.
But you, whose age demands more temperate thoughts,
With words of well-plac'd counsel teach his youth
To curb that pride, which from the gods calls down
Destruction on his head. And thou, whose age
The miseries of thy Xerxes sink with sorrow,
Go to thy house, thence choose the richest robe,
And meet thy son; for through the rage of grief
His gorgeous vestments from his royal limbs
Are foully rent. With gentlest courtesy
Sooth his affliction; for his duteous ear,
I know, will listen to thy voice alone.
Now to the realms of darkness I descend.
My ancient friends, farewell, and 'midst these ills

(26) The intention of this fine reflection was to incline the Athenians to accept the Persian monarch's proposal of peace, which Themistocles alone opposed.

Each day in pleasures bathe your drooping spirits,
For treasur'd riches nought avail the dead.

ATOSSA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

These many present, many future ills
Denounc'd on Persia sink my soul with grief.

ATOSSA.

Unhappy fortune, what a tide of ills
Bursts o'er me! Chief this foul disgrace, which shows
My son divested of his rich attire,
His royal robes all rent, distracts my thoughts.
But I will go, choose the most gorgeous vest,
And haste to meet my son. Ne'er in his woes
Will I forsake whom my soul holds most dear.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Ye powers that rule the skies,
Memory recalls our great, our happy fate,
Our well-appointed state,
The scenes of glory opening to our eyes,
When this vast empire o'er
The good Darius, with each virtue blest
That forms a monarch's breast,
Shielding his subjects with a father's care,
Invincible in war,
Extended like a god his awful power.
Then spread our arms their glory wide,
Guarding to peace her golden reign;
Each tower'd city saw with pride
Safe from the toils of war her homeward-marching train.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Nor Halys' shallow strand
He pass'd, nor from his palace mov'd his state;
He spoke; his word was Fate:
What strong-based cities could his might withstand?
Not those that lift their heads
Where to the sea the floods of Strymon pass,
Leaving the huts of Thrace;
Nor those, that far th' extended ocean o'er
Stand girt with many' a tower;
Nor where the Hellespont his broad wave spreads;
Nor the firm bastion's rampir'd might,
Whose foot the deep Propontis laves;
Nor those, that glorying in their height
Frown o'er the Pontic sea, and shade his darken'd waves.

STROPHE 2.

Each sea-girt isle around
Bow'd to this monarch: humbled Lesbos bow'd;
Paros, of its marble proud;
Naxos with vines, with olives Samos crown'd:
Him Myconus ador'd:
Chios, the seat of beauty; Andros steep,
That stretches o'er the deep
To meet the wat'ry Tenos; him each bay
Bound by th' Icarian sea,
Him Melos, Gnidus, Rhodes confess'd their lord:
O'er Cyprus stretch'd his sceptred hand:
Paphos and Solos own'd his power,
And Salamis, whose hostile strand,
The cause of all our wo, is red with Persian gore.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Ev'n the proud towns, that rear'd
Sublime along th' Ionian coast their towers,

Where wealth her treasures pours,
Peopled from Greece, his prudent reign rever'd.
With such unconquer'd might
His hardy warriors shook th' embattled fields,
Heroes that Persia yields,
And those from distant realms that took their way,
And wedg'd in close array
Beneath his glitt'ring banners claim'd the fight.
But now these glories are no more;
Farewell the big war's plumed pride:
The gods have crush'd this trophied power,
Sunk are our vanquish'd arms beneath th' indignant tide.

XERXES, CHORUS.

XERXES.

Ah me, how sudden have the storms of Fate,
Beyond all thought, all apprehension, burst
On my devoted head! O Fortune, Fortune!
With what relentless fury hath thy hand
Hurl'd desolation on the Persian race;
Wo unsupportable! The tort'ring thought
Of our lost youth comes rushing on my mind,
And sinks me to the ground. O Jove, that I
Had died with those brave men that died in fight!

CHORUS.

O thou afflicted monarch, once the lord
Of marshall'd armies, of the lustre beam'd
From glory's ray o'er Persia, of her sons
The pride, the grace, whom ruin now hath sunk
In blood! Th' unpeopled land laments her youth
By Xerxes led to slaughter, till the realms
Of death are gorg'd with Persians; for the flower

Of all the realm, thousands, whose dreadful bows
With arrowy show'r annoy'd the foe, are fall'n.

XERXES.

Your fall, heroic youths, distracts my soul.

CHORUS.

And Asia sinking on her knee, O king,
Oppress'd, with griefs oppress'd, bends to the earth.

XERXES.

And I, O wretched fortune, I was born
To crush, to desolate my ruin'd country.

CHORUS.

I have no voice, no swelling harmony,
No descant, save these notes of wo,
Harsh, and responsive to the sullen sigh,
Rude strains, that unmelodious flow,
To welcome thy return.

XERXES.

Then bid them flow, bid the wild measures flow,
Hollow, unmusical, the notes of grief;
They suit my fortune, and dejected state.

CHORUS.

Yes, at thy royal bidding shall the strain
Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'rings of my bleeding country plain,
And bid the mournful measures roll.
Again the voice of wild despair
With shrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;
For high the God of War his flaming crest
Rais'd, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest blest,
And Persia's wither'd force confounded,

Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

XERXES.

To swell thy griefs ask ev'ry circumstance.

CHORUS.

Where are thy valiant friends, thy chieftains where?
Pharnaces, Susas, and the might
Of Pelagon, and Dotamas? The spear
Of Agabatas bold in fight?
Psammis in mailed cuirass drest,
And Susiscanes' glitt'ring crest?

XERXES.

Dash'd from the Tyrian vessel on the rocks
Of Salamis they sunk, and smear'd with gore
The heroes on the dreary strand are stretch'd.

CHORUS.

Where is Pharnuchus? Ariomardus where,
With ev'ry gentle virtue graced?
Lilæus, that from chiefs renown'd in war
His high-descended lineage traced?
Where rears Sebalces his crown-circled head?
Where Tharybis to battles bred,
Artembares, Hystæchmes bold,
Memphis, Masistres sheath'd in gold?

XERXES.

Wretch that I am! These on th' abhorred town
Ogygian Athens (27), roll'd their glowing eyes

(27) Ogyges was one of the most ancient kings of Attica, or Bœotia; authors are not agreed as to the place; we have the epithet before applied to Thebes. From the antiquity of this king, all things very ancient are called Ogygian: thus even the Egyptian Thebes is Ogygian, and in Pindar we find Ogygian mountains.—STANLEY.

Indignant; but at once in the fierce shock
Of battle fell, dash'd breathless on the ground.

CHORUS.

There does the son of Batanochus lie,
Through whose rich veins th' unsullied blood
Of Susamus, down from the lineage high
Of noble Mygabatas flow'd:
Alpistus, who with faithful care
Number'd the deep'ning files of war,
The monarch's eye (28); on the ensanguin'd plain

(28) The Persian monarchs had officers whose province it was to observe, and inform the king of all that was transacted in his wide dominions; they were, therefore, called the King's Eyes: this was an office of great trust, and usually assigned to the most faithful and honourable Satraps.—STANLEY.

And now, pour donner le congé à ces remarques, the translator thinks it necessary to declare, that living altogether in a private and retired station he had not, during his engagement in this work, the opportunity of consulting any learned friend on any difficulty, and difficulties enough occurred; neither did he know till after the translation was published, that there were any annotations on Æschylus, except what Pauw has given with Stanley's edition: therefore whatever mistakes or inaccuracies may have escaped him, they are to be attributed entirely to his own want of judgement. In reading Pauw he could observe, that he sometimes suffered himself to be hurried into errors; and he lamented, that so able a critic would not allow himself time to revise what he had written: this he ascribed to a certain impetuosity of temper, which seems natural to him; he also disapproves his rude and offensive bluntness, and wished that he had learned to sacrifice to the Graces; but he saw in this saucy man much erudition, a bold genius, and a strong conception of his author's meaning, which enabled him to elucidate some passages, which were before involved in tenfold darkness: no wonder therefore, that he gratefully acknowledged his obligations to him. But he soon found, that he had taken an unpopular part; the translation was scarcely published, when he was taught to know, that his honourable mention of Pauw had given offence; he was surprised and hurt at this, but was quickly informed, that M. D'Orville had made a collection of Pauw's crudities, and published them purposely to expose the man. Shortly after this, a learned friend sent him Mr. Heath's notes: this gentleman was so highly offended at Pauw's "wanton insolence and contumelious arrogance," that he sees nothing in him but "the grossest ignorance, and a perpetual alacrity in blundering;" and if at any time he is compelled to acknowledge the justness of a remark, he accounts for it as for the blind man's shooting the crow; he therefore professedly writes

Low is the mighty warrior laid?
Is great Æbares 'mongst the heroes slain,
And Partheus number'd with the dead?—
Ah me! those bursting groans deep-charg'd with wo
The fate of Persia's princes show.

XERXES.

To my griev'd memory thy mournful voice,
Tuned to the saddest notes of wo, recalls
My brave friends lost; and my rent heart returns
In dreadful symphony the sorrowing strain.

CHORUS.

Yet once more shall I ask thee, yet once more,
Where is the Mardian Xanthes' might,
The daring chief, that from the Pontic shore
Led his strong phalanx to the fight?
Anchares where, whose high-rais'd shield
Flam'd foremost in th' embattled field?

against Pauw: this has carried him too frequently into an asperity of style, more indecent than that which had excited his indignation; besides that horrid sneer, which is like the American mode of tarring and feathering a man that has been so unhappy as to offend them: this is the more to be lamented, as in every other respect Mr. Heath seems to have been a man of a very candid and amiable disposition. But this is not the worst; his perpetual propensity to reprobate Pauw, has sometimes misled him to observations very unworthy of him as a scholar and a critic. In this case, what could the translator do? His nature is most averse to disputation; but these annotators pull violently different ways, the translation was between them, and was given to the public before he had seen the learned observations of the latter; he has done what he is persuaded a fair and honest man ought to do; he has carefully revised the translation; where he is convinced that he was mistaken, he has acknowledged and corrected the mistake; wherever in a disputed passage he thinks he has reason to adhere to his former interpretation, he fairly gives his reason; the learned reader will judge: Mr. Heath's great and deserved reputation made this in a manner necessary for his own vindication; but he hopes that he has not suffered any asperity to mingle with his dissent, as he would be the first to be ashamed of having violated that candour and good manners which are due from one gentleman to another.

Where the high leaders of thy mail-clad horse,
Dāixis and Arsaces where?
Where Cigdagatas, and Lythimnas' force,
Waving untir'd his purple spear?

XERXES.

Entomb'd, I saw them in the earth entomb'd;
Nor did the rolling car with solemn state
Attend their rites: I follow'd: low they lie,
Ah me, the once great leaders of my host
Low in the earth, without their honours lie.

CHORUS.

Oh wo, wo, wo! Unutterable wo
The Dæmons of Revenge have spread;
And Ate from her drear abode below
Rises to view the horrid deed.

XERXES.

Dismay, and rout, and ruin, ills that wait
On man's afflicted fortune, sink us down.

CHORUS.

Dismay, and rout, and ruin on us wait,
And all the vengeful storms of Fate:
Ill flows on ill, on sorrows sorrows rise;
Misfortune leads her baleful train;
Before th' Ionian squadrons Persia flies,
Or sinks ingulf'd beneath the main:
Fall'n, fall'n is her imperial pow'r,
And conquest on her banners waits no more.

XERXES.

At such a fall, such troops of heroes lost,
How can my soul but sink in deep despair!
Cease thy sad strain.

CHORUS.

Is all thy glory lost?

XERXES.

Seest thou these poor remains of my rent robes?

CHORUS.

I see, I see.

XERXES.

And this ill-furnish'd quiver?

CHORUS.

Wherefore preserv'd?

XERXES.

To store my treasur'd arrows.

CHORUS.

Few, very few.

XERXES.

And few my friendly aïds.

CHORUS.

I thought these Grecians shrunk appall'd at arms.

XERXES.

No: they are bold and daring; these sad eyes
Beheld their violent and deathful deeds.

CHORUS.

The ruin, say'st thou, of thy shatter'd fleet?

XERXES.

And in the anguish of my soul I rent
My royal robes.

CHORUS.

Wo, wo!

XERXES.

And more than wo.

CHORUS.

Redoubled, threefold wo!

XERXES.

Disgrace to me,
But triumph to the foe.

CHORUS.

Are all thy powers
In ruin crush'd?

XERXES.

No Satrap guards me now.

CHORUS.

Thy faithful friends sunk in the roaring main.

XERXES.

Weep, weep their loss, and lead me to my house;
Answer my grief with grief, an ill return
Of ills for ills. Yet once more raise that strain
Lamenting my misfortunes; beat thy breast,
Strike, heave the groan; awake the Mysian strain
To notes of loudest wo; rend thy rich robes,
Pluck up thy beard, tear off thy hoary locks,
And bathe thine eyes in tears: thus through the streets
Solemn and slow with sorrow lead my steps;
Lead to my house, and wail the fate of Persia.

CHORUS.

Yes, once more at thy bidding shall the strain
Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'ring of my bleeding country plain,
And bid the Mysian measures roll.
Again the voice of wild despair
With shrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;

For high the God of War his flaming crest
Rais'd, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest blest,
And Persia's wither'd force confounded,
Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

FINIS.

Printed by S. Hamilton, Weybridge.

THE

GREEK TRAGIC THEATRE:

CONTAINING

ÆSCHYLUS BY DR. POTTER,

SOPHOCLES BY DR. FRANCKLIN,

AND

EURIPIDES BY MICH. WODHULL, ESQ.

A NEW EDITION,

Revised and corrected throughout by the Translator;

WITH

A DISSERTATION ON ANTIENT TRAGEDY,

BY THOMAS FRANCKLIN, D. D.

LATE GREEK PROFESSOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. II. CONTAINING SOPHOCLES.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JOHN WALKER; T. PAYNE; VERNOR, HOOD, & SHARPE; R. LEA; J. NUNN; CUTHELL & MARTIN; E. JEFFERY; LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME; LACKINGTON, ALLEN, & CO.; J. BOOKER; J. RICHARDSON; BLACK, PARRY, & KINGSBURY; J. FAULDER; J. ASPERNE; AND J. HARRIS.

1809.

TO

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE

PRINCE OF WALES.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS.

ANTIENT tragedy in its pure and perfect state was made subservient only to the noblest purposes, and sacred to truth, religion, and virtue. This species of the drama attained to its highest degree of perfection in the time, and under the direction of the immortal Sophocles, the acknowledged prince of tragic poets, the admiration of all Greece, the envy of his contemporaries, and in a word, the Shakespear of antiquity.

Such is the work, and such the author, which I have the honour to present to your ROYAL HIGHNESS. That a writer so universally applauded, should never yet have been seen in an English habit (for the disguises,

which he has hitherto worn, are not worthy of that name) is certainly a matter of astonishment; but Sophocles seems purposely to have waited for the present happy opportunity of making his first appearance amongst us, under the patronage of your ROYAL HIGHNESS; a circumstance, which has made him ample retribution for all our former slight and neglect of him. The author of the following sheets, though conscious of his own inabilities, and the difficulty of the task which he has undertaken, approaches your ROYAL HIGHNESS with confidence, as satisfied that the same kindness and humanity which induced your ROYAL HIGHNESS to accept these volumes, will also pardon their errors and imperfections; and at the same time flatters himself that the rest of his readers will pay some deference to so illustrious an example.

Your ROYAL HIGHNESS will pardon me, if, with my warmest acknowledgments on this occasion, I take the liberty to mingle my

hearty congratulations on this day's solemnity: the world of letters, and the circle of arts and sciences, have a peculiar interest in every thing that concerns their patron and protector: permit me therefore, in their name, to wish your ROYAL HIGHNESS that health, happiness, and prosperity, on which their own must, in a great measure, depend: permit me to wish that Britain, under your ROYAL HIGHNESS's influence, may become the darling seat of taste and genius, the throne of literature, and the constant residence of honour, freedom, piety, and virtue: this, may it please your ROYAL HIGHNESS, is the wish, this is the well-founded hope of all, and of none more truly, firmly, and sincerely, than

May it please your ROYAL HIGHNESS,

Your ROYAL HIGHNESS's

Most devoted, obliged,

And obedient Servant,

THOMAS FRANCKLIN.

CONTENTS.

PAGE.

AJAX 1

ELECTRA 63

PHILOCTETES 133

ANTIGONE 203

TRACHINIÆ 265

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS 321

ŒDIPUS COLONEUS 401

AJAX.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MINERVA.

ULYSSES.

AJAX.

TECMESSA, Wife of Ajax.

TEUCER, Brother to Ajax.

AGAMEMNON.

MENELAUS.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, composed of Antient Men of Salamis.

AJAX.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Field near the Tent of AJAX.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MINERVA.

SON of Laertes, thy unweary'd spirit
Is ever watchful to surprise the foe;
I have observ'd thee wand'ring midst the tents
In search of Ajax, where his station lies,
At th' utmost verge, and meas'ring o'er his steps
But late impress'd; like Sparta's hounds of scent
Sagacious, dost thou trace him, nor in vain;
For know, the man thou seek'st is not far from thee:
Yonder he lies, with reeking brow and hands
Deep-stain'd with gore; cease then thy search, and tell me
Wherefore thou com'st, that so I may inform
Thy doubting mind, and best assist thy purpose.

ULYSSES.

Minerva, dearest of th' immortal pow'rs,

Sparta's hounds, &c. The dogs of Sparta, according to all the best authors of antiquity, were remarkable for their swiftness and quick scent; Virgil mentions the veloces Spartæ catulos; Gratius Faliscus also takes notice of them: our countryman Shakespear, therefore, we see, had good authority for his recommendation of Theseus's hounds, who, he tells us,

Were of the Spartan kind,
So flew'd, so sanded, &c. See his Midsummer Night's Dream.

For, tho' I see thee not, that well-known voice
Doth like the Tyrrhene trump awake my soul,
Right hast thou said, I come to search my foe,
Shield-bearing Ajax: him alone I seek:
A deed of horror hath he done this night,
If it be he, for yet we are to know
The certain-proof, and therefore came I here
A willing messenger: the cattle all,
Our flocks and herds, are with their shepherds slain,
To Ajax ev'ry tongue imputes the crime;
One of our spies who saw him on the plain,
His sword still reeking with fresh blood, confirm'd it:
Instant I fled to search him, and sometimes
I trace his footsteps, which again I lose
I know not how; in happy hour thou com'st
To aid me, Goddess; thy protecting hand
Hath rul'd me ever, and to thee I trust
My future fate.

MINERVA.

I know it well, Ulysses,
And therefore come to guard and to assist thee
Propitious to thy purpose.

Tho' I see thee not, &c. It was the acknowledged and indisputable privilege of heathen gods and goddesses to be visible and invisible, as they thought proper, and likewise to extend, whenever they pleased, that privilege to others; in the two first scenes of Ajax we have instances of both; in the first, Minerva is not seen by Ulysses, and in the second, Ulysses, by the power of Minerva, is rendered invisible to Ajax. The reason of the latter is sufficiently evident; for the former, is not so easy to assign any, as the goddess had descended on purpose to converse with her favourite; to conceal herself therefore from his sight seems unaccountable.

Shield-bearing Ajax, &c. The greater Ajax is distinguished by Homer, from whom Sophocles copies his character, for his enormous shield, which none but himself was able to lift; in the seventh book of the Iliad we find it thus described:

Stern Telamon behind his ample shield,
As from a brazen tow'r, o'erlook'd the field;
Huge was its orb, with sev'n thick folds o'ercast
Of tough bull-hides, of solid brass the last. POPE.

ULYSSES.

Do I right,
My much-lov'd mistress?

MINERVA.

Doubtless; his foul deed
Doth well deserve it.

ULYSSES.

What cou'd prompt his hand
To such a desp'rate act?

MINERVA.

Achilles' arms;
His rage for loss of them.

ULYSSES.

But wherefore thus
Destroy the flock?

MINERVA.

'Twas in your blood he thought
His hands were stain'd.

ULYSSES.

Against the Grecians then
Was all his wrath?

MINERVA.

And fatal had it prov'd
To them, if I had not prevented it.

ULYSSES.

What daring insolence cou'd move his soul
To such a deed?

MINERVA.

Alone by night he wander'd
In secret to attack you.

ULYSSES.

Did he come
Close to our tents?

MINERVA.

Ev'n to the double portal,
Where rest your chiefs.

ULYSSES.

What pow'r could then withhold
His madd'ning hand?

MINERVA.

I purposely deceiv'd
His sight, and sav'd him from the guilty joy,
Turning his rage against the mingled flocks,
Your gather'd spoil; on these with violence
He rush'd, and slaughter'd many; now he thought
That he had slain th' Atridæ, now believ'd
Some other chiefs had perish'd by his hand.
I saw his madness and still urg'd him on,
That he might fall into the snare I laid:
Tired with his slaughter now he binds in chains
The living victim, drives the captive herd
Home to his tent, nor doubts but they are men:
There beats with many a stripe the helpless foe,
But I will shew thee this most glaring frenzy,
That to the Grecians what they eyes behold
Thou may'st report; be confident, nor fear
His utmost malice; I shall turn his sight
Askant from thee. Ajax, what ho! come forth,
Thou who dost bind in chains thy captive foes,
Ajax, I say, come forth before the portal.

ULYSSES.

What would'st thou do, Minerva? Do not call him.

MINERVA.

What shou'd Ulysses fear?

There beats with many a stripe, &c. In allusion to this circumstance, the title of the play in the original is Αιας Μαστιγοφορος, or Ajax the whip-bearer; so called either by Sophocles himself, or some of the antient commentators, to distinguish it from Ajax the Locrian, another tragedy written by him, but now lost. As the appellation of whip-bearer, however happily adapted to an Attic, might not so well suit the delicacy of an English ear, I have taken the liberty to sink it upon my readers, who, I apprehend, will be content with the title of Ajax only. Mr. Brumoy, for the same reason has omitted it, and calls it, in his translation, Ajax furieux.

ULYSSES.

O! by the Gods
I do intreat thee, let him stay within.

MINERVA.

But wherefore? Thou hast seen him here before.

ULYSSES.

He ever was, and is my deadliest foe.

MINERVA.

O! but to laugh an enemy to scorn
Is mirth most grateful.

ULYSSES.

I had rather still
He came not here.

MINERVA.

And art thou then afraid
To see a madman?

ULYSSES.

I shou'd little dread
The sight of Ajax in his better mind.

MINERVA.

He will not see thee be thou e'er so near.

ULYSSES.

Impossible! his eyes are still the same.

MINERVA.

But I shall throw a veil of darkness o'er them.

ULYSSES.

By pow'rs immortal all things may be done.

MINERVA.

Wait then in silence till he comes.

ULYSSES.

I will;
And yet 'twere better to retire.

'Twere better to retire, &c. Sophocles has closely copied his great master, Homer, in the character of Ulysses, who is drawn by them both as a man of extraordinary prudence and circumspection, with more caution than courage, and more cunning than generosity. He is extremely loth, we may observe, to trust himself with Ajax, even though he had a goddess to protect him: I had rather, says he, after all, be a

MINERVA.

What ho!
Ajax, again I call thee, wherefore pay'st thou
So little rev'rence to thy guardian pow'r?

SCENE II.

AJAX, MINERVA, ULYSSES.

AJAX.

Hail to the daughter of great Jove! to thee,
Minerva, hail! thou com'st in happy hour,
For I will crown thee with the golden spoils
Which I have gain'd by thy assisting hand.

MINERVA.

Well hast thou spoke; but say, has Ajax dip'd
His spear in Grecian blood?

AJAX.

It is my boast;
I'll not deny it.

MINERVA.

Did th' Atridæ feel
Thy vengeful arm?

AJAX.

They never will again
Dishonour Ajax.

MINERVA.

If I understand thee,
They are both dead.

little farther off. Hic (says Camerarius in a note on this passage) est timor prudentiæ, this is but a prudent fear, for who would wish to meet a madman? Brumoy, however, is of another opinion; il me paroit (says he) un peu lache, & J'avoue que ce trait n' ést pas à la louange d'Ulysse ni de Sophocle; mais le roi d'Ithaque etoit trop connu pour le deguiser aux spectateurs, & les idées de prudence & de bravoure étoient alors bien differentes de celles d' aujourd'huy. To say the truth, prudence among the antients seems to have favoured a little of cowardice, as their courage and valour bordered too closely on savageness and brutality.

AJAX.

They are; now let 'em come,
And take my arms away.

MINERVA.

But tell me, Ajax;
Laertes' son, hath he escap'd thy wrath?

AJAX.

Talk'st thou of him, that fox accurs'd?

MINERVA.

I mean
Thy foe, Ulysses.

AJAX.

O! he is my captive,
The fairest of my spoils, I have him here;
He shall not perish yet.

MINERVA.

What 'vantage then
Mean'st thou to draw from his confinement?

AJAX.

First,
I'll have him bound to th' pillar.

MINERVA.

And, what then
Wou'dst thou inflict?

AJAX.

His limbs all purpled o'er
With many a bloody stripe, he shall be slain.

MINERVA.

Do not torment him thus.

AJAX.

In all things else,
Minerva, would I gratify thy will,
But this, and this alone must be his fate.

MINERVA.

Since 'tis so pleasing to thee, be it so,

Since 'tis so pleasing to thee. The Greek is, επειδη σοι τερπις, which, literally translated, answers to our phrase, since it is thy pleasure; but this

Nor quit thy purpose.

AJAX.

I must to my work;
Thus, great Minerva, may'st thou ever smile
Propitious on me, and assist thy Ajax! [*Exit.*

SCENE III.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MINERVA.

Behold, Ulysses, here the mighty strength
Of pow'r divine: liv'd there a man more wise,
More fam'd for noble deeds than Ajax was?

ULYSSES.

None, none indeed; alas! I pity him;
Ev'n in a foe I pity such distress,
For he is wedded to the worst of woes:
His hapless state reminds me of my own,
And tells me that frail mortals are no more
Than a vain image and an empty shade.

MINERVA.

Let such examples teach thee to beware
Against the Gods thou utter aught profane:
And if perchance in riches or in pow'r
Thou shin'st superior, be not insolent;
For, know, a day sufficeth to exalt
Or to depress the state of mortal man;
The wise and good are by the Gods belov'd,
But those, who practise evil, they abhor, [*Exeunt.*

is generally made use of by us from an inferior to a superior, and consequently would be improper from Minerva to Ajax, where it is the direct contrary: she only means to say, since it gives thee such extraordinary delight and satisfaction; which sense I have endeavoured to express as concisely as possible in the translation.

CHORUS.

I.

To thee, O! Ajax, valiant son
Of illustrious Telamon,
Monarch of the sea-girt isle,
Fair Salamis, if fortune smile
On thee, I raise the tributary song,
For praise and virtue still to thee belong:
But when, inflicted by the wrath of Jove,
Grecian slander blasts thy fame,
And foul reproach attaints thy name,
Then do I tremble like the fearful dove.

II.

So, the last unhappy night,
Clamours loud did reach mine ear
And fill'd my anxious heart with fear,
Which talk'd of Grecian cattle slain,
And Ajax madd'ning o'er the plain,
Pleas'd at his prey, rejoicing at the sight.

To thee, O! Ajax. The chorus is formed, with great propriety, of Salaminian soldiers, the countrymen and followers of Ajax, who having heard the report, already spread through the army, of Ajax's madness, and the slaughter of the cattle, express the deepest concern for their unhappy master. If this fact asserted was true, such, say they, was the will of the gods who had deprived him of his senses; he is therefore to be pitied, not condemned; if, as they are rather inclined to believe, it was only a story invented by the artful Ulysses, on purpose to calumniate him, it behoved the hero immediately to appear and contradict it: of this, interspersed with moral reflections, consists the first chorus, which, according to the commentators, was a song between the acts; the French call it, intermede: the chorus before us is made up, in the original, of anapæsts, with a strophe, antistrophe, and epode; I have thrown the whole into one irregular ode of eight stanzas, and divided them as the change of sentiment seemed to point out and direct me; whether it be done properly must be left to the determination of the reader.

If fortune smile. The original is σε μεν ευ πρασσοντ', quando bene tecum agitur: so we say a man *does well*, when he succeeds in the world.

Last unhappy night. Gr. της φθιμενης νυκτος, the night that is perished; a remarked Greek idiom.

III.

Thus false Ulysses can prevail,
Whisp'ring to all his artful tale,
His tale alas! too willingly receiv'd;
Whilst those who hear are glad to know
And happy to insult thy woe,
For, who asperse the great are easily believ'd.

IV.

The poor, like us, alone are free
From the darts of calumny,
Whilst envy still attends on high estate:
Small is the aid which we can lend,
Without the rich and pow'rful friend;
The great support the low, the low assist the great.
But 'tis a truth which fools will never know;
From such alone the clamours came
Which strove to hurt thy spotless fame,
Whilst we can only weep, and not relieve thy woe.

V.

Happy to 'scape thy piercing sight,
Behold them wing their rapid flight,
As trembling birds from hungry vultures fly,
Sudden again shou'dst thou appear,
The cowards wou'd be mute with fear,
And all their censures in a moment die.

VI.

Cynthia, goddess of the grove,
Daughter of immortal Jove,
To whom at Tauris frequent altars rise,

To whom at Tauris, &c. Ταυροπολον, id est, Taurivagam vocant Dianam (says Camerarius) vel quod in Taurica culta fuerit, vel propter terriculamenta nocturna Hecates, vel nescio quam ob causam, that is, they call Diana Ταυροπολα, either because she was worshipped at Tauris, or because of the nocturnal incantations of Hecate, or for I know not what reason (which by the bye is an excellent way of solving the difficulty;) the first reason however is most probably the true one, which I have therefore adopted in the translation.

Indignant might inspire the deed,
And bid the guiltless cattle bleed,
Depriv'd of incense due, and wonted sacrifice.
Perhaps, sad cause of all our grief and shame!
The god of war with brazen shield,
For fancy'd inj'ries in the field,
Might thus avenge the wrong, and brand thy name.

VII.

For never in his perfect mind,
Had Ajax been to ill inclin'd,
On flocks and herds his rage had never spent;
It was inflicted from above:
May Phœbus and all-powerful Jove
Avert the crime, or stop the punishment!
If to th' Atridæ the bold fiction came
From Sisyphus' detested race,
No longer, Ajax, hide thy face,
But from thy tents come forth, and vindicate thy fame.

VIII.

Ajax, thy too long repose
Adds new vigour to thy foes,
As flames from aiding winds still fiercer grow;
Whilst the loose laugh, and shameless lie,
And all their bitter calumny,
With double weight oppress, and fill our hearts with woe.

From Sisyphus' detested race. Or, in other words, from Ulysses, whom the chorus means to reproach as the bastard son of Sisyphus; concerning which circumstance, the antients, who had perhaps as well as ourselves a little taste for scandal, tell the following tale; Anticlea the mother of Ulysses, in her journey towards her betrothed husband, Laertes, was violently seized on by Sisyphus, King of Corinth, and deflowered by him. Ulysses was supposed to have been the fruit of this stolen embrace, though Laertes, who afterwards married the lady, was obliged to educate him as his own. There is likewise another story, to be met with in the Scholia, of her being prostituted to Sisyphus by her father Autolicus. Both Æschylus and Euripides mention the bastardy of Ulysses; Sophocles also repeats it in the Philoctetes.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECMESSA.

SONS of Erectheus, of Athenian race,
Ye brave companions of the valiant Ajax,
Oppress'd with grief behold a wretched woman,
Far from her native soil, appointed here
To watch your hapless lord, and mourn his fate.

CHORUS.

What new misfortune hath the night brought forth?
Say, daughter of Teleutas, for with thee

Sons of Erectheus, &c. The Athenians, who were remarkably proud of their antiquity, styled themselves, αχθονιοι αυτοσχθονες, as sprung from the earth, the original natives of the spot, and coeval with the soil they inhabited. Erectheus is reported to have been the offspring of Vulcan, and the earth; from him the Athenians boasted their descent, and they could not well go higher: Salamis was not far from Athens; Sophocles therefore salutes the followers of Ajax by the name of Athenians, and takes this opportunity to indulge the vanity of his countrymen, by calling them the sons of Erectheus: for joining the inhabitants of Salamis to the Athenians, Sophocles had the authority of Homer;

> With these appear the Salaminian bands,
> Whom the gigantic Telamon commands;
> In twelve black ships, to Troy they steer their course,
> And with the great Athenians join their force.
>
> POPE'S Homer, B. 2. L. 670.

Daughter of Teleutas, &c. Tecmessa, who is here introduced as the wife of Ajax, fell to him, as Briseis to Achilles, by the fate of war: her father Teleutas, was a petty king in Phrygia, whose dominions being taken and plundered by Ajax, the daughter became his captive, and was afterwards advanced to his bed, in quality, we may suppose, of his chief sultana; by her, we find, he had a child whom the father named Eurysaces, from ευρυς σακος, a broad shield, in memory of that part of his own armour, by which, as we have before observed, he was so eminently distinguished; this child is afterwards brought on the stage, a circumstance artfully introduced by the poet, to heighten the distress

His captive bride, the noble Ajax deigns
To share the nuptial bed, and therefore thou
Can'st best inform us.

TECMESSA.

How shall I declare
Sadder than death th' unutterable woe!
This night, with madness seiz'd, hath Ajax done
A dreadful deed; within thou may'st behold
The tents o'erspread with bloody carcases
Of cattle slain, the victims of his rage.

CHORUS.

Sad news indeed thou bring'st of that brave man,
A dire disease! and not by human aid
To be remov'd; already Greece hath heard
And wond'ring crowds repeat the dreadful tale:
Alas! I fear th' event! I fear me much,
Lest with their flocks and herds the shepherds slain,
Against himself he lift his murth'rous hand.

TECMESSA.

Alas! this way he led his captive spoils,
And some he slew, and others tore in sunder;
From out the flock two rams of silver hue
He chose, from one the head and tongue divided,
He cast them from him; then the other chain'd
Fast to the pillar, with a doubled rein
Bore cruel stripes, and bitt'rest execrations,
Which not from mortal came, but were inspir'd
By that avenging god who thus torments him.

CHORUS.

Now then, my friends, (for so the time demands)
Each o'er his head shou'd cast the mournful veil,
And instant fly, or to our ships repair,
And sail with speed; for dreadful are the threats

of the piece. Homer, in his catalogue of famous mistresses, has not forgot our heroine.

Movit Ajacem Talamone natum,
Forma captivæ dominum Tecmessæ. Lib. 9. Od. 4.

Of the Atridæ; death may be our lot,
And we shall meet an equal punishment
With him whom we lament, our frantic lord.

TECMESSA.

He raves not now; but like the southern blast,
When lightnings cease and all the storm is o'er,
Grows calm again; yet to his sense restor'd,
He feels new griefs; for O! to be unhappy,
And know ourselves alone the guilty cause
Of all our sorrows, is the worst of woes.

CHORUS.

Yet if his rage subside we shou'd rejoice;
The ill remov'd, we shou'd remove our care.

TECMESSA.

Hadst thou then rather, if the choice were giv'n,
Thyself at ease, behold thy friend in pain,
Than with thy friend be join'd in mutual sorrow?

CHORUS.

The double grief is sure the most oppressive.

TECMESSA.

Therefore, tho' not distemper'd, I am wretched.

CHORUS.

I understand thee not.

TECMESSA.

The noble Ajax,
Whilst he was mad, was happy in his frenzy,
And yet the while affected me with grief
Who was not so; but now his rage is o'er;
And he hath time to breathe from his misfortune,
Himself is almost dead with grief, and I
Not less unhappy than I was before;
Is it not double then?

CHORUS.

It is indeed;
And much I fear the wrath of angry Heav'n,
If from his madness ceas'd he yet receive
No kind relief.

TECMESSA.

'Tis so; and 'twere most fit
You knew it well.

CHORUS.

Say then how it began;
For like thyself we feel for his misfortunes.

TECMESSA.

Since you partake the sorrows of a friend,
I'll tell you all; know then, at dead of night,
What time the evening taper were expir'd,
Snatching his sword, he seem'd as if he meant
To roam abroad, I saw and chid him for it;
What woud'st thou do, I cry'd, my dearest Ajax?
Unask'd, uncall'd for, whither woud'st thou go?
No trumpet sounds to battle, the whole host
Is wrap'd in sleep: then did he answer me
With brief but sharp rebuke, as he was wont;
" Woman, thy sex's noblest ornament
Is silence;" thus reprov'd, I said no more:
Then forth he rush'd alone, where, and for what,
I knew not; but returning, he brought home
In chains the captive herd, in pieces some
He tore, whilst others bound like slaves he lash'd
Indignant; then out at the portal ran,
And with some shadow seem'd to hold discourse;
Against th' Atridæ, and Ulysses oft
Wou'd he inveigh; or, laughing loud, rejoice
That he had ta'en revenge for all his wrongs;
Then back he came; at length, by slow degrees,
His frenzy ceas'd; when soon as he beheld

With some shadow, &c. This alludes to the conversation with Minerva, in the first act; Tecmessa, we may suppose, was in a chamber adjoining to them, and overheard their discourse; but as Minerva had rendered both herself and Ulysses invisible, Tecmessa could not imagine whom he was talking to; she adds this circumstance therefore to the other symptoms of his madness. There is a passage not unlike this in Hamlet. See Act 3. Sc. 10.

The tents o'erwhelm'd with slaughter, he cry'd out,
And beat his brain; roll'd o'er the bloody heaps
Of cattle slain, and tore his clotted hair,
Long fix'd in silence: then, with horrid threats
He bade me tell him all that had befall'n,
And what he had been doing; I obey'd,
Trembling with fear, and told him all I knew.
Instant he pour'd forth bitt'rest lamentations,
Such as I ne'er had heard from him before,
For grief like that, he oft wou'd say, betray'd
A weak and little mind, and therefore ever
When sorrow came, refrain'd from loud complaint,
And, like the lowing heifer, inly mourn'd.
But sinking now beneath this sore distress,
He will not taste of food or nourishment;
Silent he sits, amid the slaughter'd cattle,
Or, if he speaks, utters such dreadful words
As shews a mind intent on something ill:
Now then, my friends, for therefore came I hither,
O! if ye have the pow'r, assist me now;
Perhaps ye may; for oft th' afflicted man
Will listen to the counsels of a friend.

CHORUS.

O! daughter of Teleutas, horrible
Indeed thy tidings are of noble Ajax,
Thus raving, and thus miserable.

AJAX (*within, groans.*)

Oh!

He will not taste of food. The abstinence of Ajax on this occasion, which, we may imagine, was not peculiar to himself, seems to be among those customs which the Grecians borrowed from the eastern nations: we read in Scripture, that when David was afflicted for the loss of his child, he would not eat bread, nor drink wine; it appears from this, and many other passages in Sophocles, that he was no stranger to the manners and phraseology of the orientals; though I would not, on this occasion, venture to affirm, that David and Sophocles were but one person, in imitation of my learned predecessor, Duport, who so positively asserted, that Homer and Solomon were the same.

TECMESSA.

Louder you'll hear him soon; mark'd ye, my friends,
How deep his groans?

AJAX *(within.)*

O! me!

CHORUS.

He seems to rave,
Or mourns, reflecting on his madness past.

AJAX *(within.)*

Boy, boy!

TECMESSA.

Alas! he calls Eurysaces,
Where art thou, child? What wou'd he have with thee?

AJAX *(within.)*

Teucer, 'tis thee I call, where art thou, Teucer?
Still must he chase his prey, whilst Ajax dies?

CHORUS.

He seems of perfect mind—open the doors,
Let him come forth, who knows but sight of us
May keep him so.

TECMESSA.

I'll open them—now see.

(The doors are thrown open, and AJAX *discover'd.)*

Your master there, and judge of his condition.

SCENE II.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX.

My dear companions, who alone deserve
The name of friends, ye see the dreadful storm

My dear companions, &c. From line 347 to line 427 of the original, instead of the common metre, it is all strophe and antistrophe, which was most probably set to music and sung in the manner of the chorus: this was often done by Sophocles and the other tragic writers in the more pathetic and impassioned parts of the drama, and met, as we may imagine, with a favourable reception in the Grecian theatre; but as

How it o'erwhelms me.

CHORUS.

What thou said'st, alas! [*Aside to* TECMESSA.
Was but too true, he seems indeed distracted.

AJAX.

My fellow-sailors! whose assisting hand
Ply'd the tough oar, and led me thro' the main,
From you alone can I expect to meet
Or love or friendship; therefore shew it now,
And kill me.

CHORUS.

Talk not thus, nor thus increase
By added woes thy dreadful malady.

AJAX.

Dost thou behold this once intrepid Ajax,
The brave, the mighty, long for strength renown'd
And dauntless courage in the bloody field,
Dost thou behold him? O what laughter now,
What vile reproach must he sustain!

TECMESSA.

O Ajax,
My lord, my master, do not talk thus sadly.

AJAX (*to* TECMESSA.)

Wilt thou not home? Wilt not be gone?

question and answer put into ode or rhime would have a different effect amongst us, I have preserved the blank verse in this and some other parallel passages, as more proper for dialogue.

Seems indeed distracted. Ajax is here represented as sitting alone in his tent just recovered from his delirium, and reflecting with horror on what he had done during the continuance of it: what the Chorus here observes concerning his distraction doth not therefore proceed from any thing which he says, but, probably, from a wildness in his looks and gesture which still remained, and induced them to believe that his distemper was not quite removed. Ajax, indeed, as Brumoy observes, seems throughout this whole scene like the sea after a storm, whose waves are still agitated, and subsiding by degrees into calmness and tranquillity.

Wilt thou not home, &c. The mind of Ajax is so disturbed that he returns the tenderness of his wife with peevishness and anger. I have

TECMESSA.

Oh me!

CHORUS.

Be patient; by the Gods let me intreat you,
Be more compos'd.

AJAX.

Wretch that I was, to let
The curst Atridæ scape, and shed the blood
Of harmless cattle!

CHORUS.

But why sorrow thus
For what is past, and cannot be recall'd?

AJAX.

How will that subtle instrument of ill,
Laertes' prying son, insult me now,
And smile at my misfortunes!

CHORUS.

That must be
As seems most fitting to the Gods; from them
Or grief or joy must flow.

AJAX.

O wou'd to heav'n
That I could see him! wretched as I am!

CHORUS.

This is no time for boasting: see'st thou not
How very weak thou art?

AJAX.

Almighty Jove,
My great progenitor! O grant me this!
Grant me to slay that hateful, talking slave,
With the proud princes; then well pleas'd myself
Shou'd perish last.

endeavoured in the translation to render it with that brevity and sharpness which passion generally makes use of. The ladies may observe the modesty of Tecmessa's behaviour, she answers him only with a sigh.

Jove, my great progenitor! Ajax's genealogical table stands thus: Ajax was the son of Telamon, the son of Æacus, the son of Jove. Jupiter therefore was his great grandfather.

TECMESSA.

O! if thou pray'st for death,
Pray too for mine; for wherefore shou'd I live
When thou art gone?

AJAX.

O darkness, my best light
And hope! O wrap me in your friendly shade,
A willing guest! I dare not look for help,
Or from the Gods above, or men below:
The pow'rful daughter of eternal Jove
To death devotes me: whither can I fly,
Or where remain, my fame and glory lost
In this sad frenzy? left without a friend,
And the whole army bent on my destruction!

TECMESSA.

Alas! how dreadful 'tis to hear such words,
Which Ajax never wou'd have spoke before!

AJAX.

Ye well-known floods that roll into the main,
Ye caves and forests by the rocky shore!
Years heap'd on years fast by the walls of Troy
Have ye detain'd me, but no longer now
Amongst the living shall ye ever see
The hapless Ajax; this remember all:
Nor shall thy neighb'ring waves, Scamander, still
To Greece beneficent, behold me more:
Troy never saw, forgive the boastful word,
A braver, nobler foe than Ajax was,
Tho' now dishonour'd thus, and thus oppress'd.

CHORUS.

I wou'd not have thee thus lament thy woes,
And yet I know not how to chide thee for it,
So hard thy lot.

AJAX.

Who wou'd have thought my name

Who wou'd have thought my name, &c. To know the meaning of this passage, the reader should understand Greek; it being nothing more than a poor pun on the name of Ajax, which in the original begins with *ai*, an

Wou'd e'er so well have suited my condition!
O! I have reason to lament indeed,
For sure there is not such a wretch as Ajax!
Long since at Troy my valiant father fought,
And to his native land, with glory crown'd,
Bore back the meed of his distinguish'd virtues:
Nor less renown'd for gallant deeds was once
His hapless son, tho' now he perish thus
Inglorious: yet Achilles, well I know,
Were he alive, and to bestow his arms
On him who best deserv'd the prize, to me
And me alone wou'd judge the great reward:
But little deem'd th' Atridæ worth like mine,
And therefore gave them to that vile impostor,
Author of ev'ry evil work, Ulysses.
Had not my mind been wrought on by some pow'r
Superior, and my eyes averted from them,
They had not liv'd to give another sentence;
But Jove's great daughter, the invincible,
The dreadful Pallas, turn'd my arm aside,
Just rais'd against them, and inspir'd me thus
With horrid rage to dip my murd'rous hand
In blood of guiltless cattle: they mean time
Smile at the danger scap'd, and triumph o'er me.,
But, when the Gods oppose us, valour bends
To cowardice, and strength to weakness yields:
What then can Ajax? hateful to the gods,
By Troy detested, and by Greece forsaken?
Shall I go leave the Atridæ here alone

exclamation like our Oh! expressive of pain and sorrow. It is, to say the truth, not very worthy of Sophocles, and much of a piece with Shakespear's,

——— This is Rome indeed,
And room enough. JUL. CÆSAR.

But our Author is not often guilty of this, and should therefore be pardoned for it. Ovid, who loved trifling, has also played upon the name of Ajax. See Met. Lib. 13.

To lament. Another pun; the word αιαζειν signifying to lament.

To fight their cause, and seek my native land?
But how shall I appear before my father,
How will he bear to see his Ajax thus
Spoil'd of his honours! he who ever crown'd
With glory sits; it must not, can not be.
What if I rush amid the Trojan host,
And with my single arm oppose them all,
Do something noble, and as nobly perish!
But that wou'd please th' Atridæ, therefore never
Shall it be done: No, I will do a deed
To shew my father that I still deserve
The name of son, and emulate my sire:
When life but teems with unremitted woes,
'Tis poor in man to wish a longer date:
For what can day on day, and year on year
But put off wish'd-for death, and lengthen pain?
Of little worth is he who still depends
On fruitless hope; for it becomes the brave
To live with honour, or to die with glory.
Ye have my thoughts.

CHORUS.

Thoughts not unworthy of thee,
Ajax; but quit, O! quit thy horrid purpose,
And yield thee to thy friends.

TECMESSA.

My lord, my master,
My dearest Ajax, dreadful are the ills
Which cruel fortune brings on human kind:
Of noblest race (a better Phrygia boasts not)

My lord, my master, &c. This speech of Tecmessa's has been deservedly applauded by the critics as one of the most masterly and pathetic in the whole tragedy. Ce ne sont pas (says Brumoy) de ces sentimens delicats & recherchéz qu'on a mis depuis à la mode sur le théâtre; ce sont les expressions vives de l'amitié conjugal. This scene, as well as that which follows between Ajax and his son, is manifestly imitated from the parting of Hector and Andromache in the 6th Book of Homer's Iliad, to which I refer my readers. The copy is not, perhaps, much inferior to the original.

Tecmessa was, and from a father sprung
Happy and free, tho' now a wretched slave;
For so the Gods and thy all-conqu'ring arm
Decreed: but since, partaker of thy bed,
Thou know'st I ever have with tend'rest care
Watch'd o'er thee: therefore, by domestic Jove,
Here I intreat thee, by the sacred tie
That binds us, let me not with foul reproach
And bitter scorn be taunted by thy foes,
When they surround me, as I know they will:
For O! when thou shalt die, that very day
The Greeks with violence will seize on me;
Tecmessa then and thy lov'd son shall eat
The bread of slav'ry; then some haughty lord
Insulting loud, shall cry, behold the wife
Of Ajax, once the pride of all our host,
How is she fall'n! from envy'd happiness
To servitude and woe! such vile upbraidings
Oft shall I hear, on thee and on thy race
Casting foul shame: O! then relent, my Ajax;
Think on thy father in the vale of years,
Think on thy aged mother, who with vows
Incessant prays the Gods to send thee back
Safe to thy native land! pity thy son,
Without a father in his tender youth
To form his mind, left to th' unfriendly hands
Of those who love him not: Alas! what woes
Wilt thou bequeath to me and to thy child!
I have no hope, no stay but thee alone.
Thy hand destroy'd my country, and my mother;
Death snatch'd my father to the realms below;
Depriv'd of thee what country will receive me,
Or where shall I subsist? Thou art my all,

The bread of slav'ry. This is literally translated; the expression is much in the style of the Scriptures, where we meet with the bread of sorrow, the bread of wickedness, the bread of sincerity, and the like.

My only safe-guard: do not, do not leave me!
Nought so becomes a man as gratitude
For good receiv'd, and noble deeds are still
The offspring of benevolence, whilst he
With whom remembrance dies of blessings past
Is vile and worthless.

CHORUS.

O! that thou could'st feel
Pity like mine for this unhappy woman!
Then wou'dst thou say her words deserve thy praise.

AJAX.

And prais'd she shall be if she but perform
What I require.

TECMESSA.

In all will I obey thee,
My dearest Ajax!

AJAX.

I wou'd see my child;
Let him be brought.

TECMESSA.

I hid him from thy sight
Because of ———

AJAX.

My distemper, was it not?

TECMESSA.

It was: I fear'd indeed thou might'st destroy him:

AJAX.

And well thou might'st: a deed like that became
My sad condition.

TECMESSA.

Therefore to prevent it
I kept him from thee.

AJAX.

I approve thy caution.

TECMESSA.

What would'st thou have me do?

AJAX.

Let me behold
And speak to him.

TECMESSA.

He is not far from hence,
The servants have him in their care.

AJAX.

Then why
May I not see him?

TECMESSA.

Boy! thy father calls thee:
Let some one bring him hither.

AJAX.

Is he coming,
Doth he not hear thee?

TECMESSA.

They have brought him to thee.
[*Enter Servants with* EURYSACES.

SCENE III.

EURYSACES, TECMESSA, AJAX, CHORUS.

AJAX.

Bring him this way: for if he be the son
Of Ajax, the fresh blood that hangs about me
Will not affright him; he must learn like me
In earliest years the savage laws of war,
And be inur'd to scenes of death and slaughter:
May'st thou, my boy, be happier than thy father!
In all things else it will be no disgrace
To copy me: I envy thee, my child,
For that thou see'st not thy own wretchedness;
The happiness of life is not to know.
Thy ignorance will keep thee free from pain,
Till time shall teach thee what it is to grieve
And to rejoice; then must thou shew thy foes

From whom thou art descended: may the breath
Of life mean time nourish thy tender frame,
That thou may'st prove a comfort to thy mother!
I know there's not a Grecian that will dare
Insult thee, when thy father is no more;
For I shall leave thee to the best of guardians,
The faithful Teucer, who far from thee now
Sent forth by Greece repels th' invading foe.
Of you, my friends, companions of the war,
The only boon I ask is, that ye urge
This last request to Teucer, say, I begg'd
That straight to Telamon and Eribœa,
My aged parents, he wou'd bear my child,
To be the joy of their declining years,
Till death shall call them to the shades below:
Let not my arms by Greece, or by that plague
Ulysses, e'er be made the prize of glory
For rival chiefs: but do thou take, my boy,
[*turning to* EURYSACES.
The sev'nfold, vast, impenetrable shield
Whose name thou bear'st; the rest be bury'd with me.
Take hence the child with speed; nor in the tents
Let there be wailings: Women ever love
To brood o'er sorrows, and indulge their woe.
Shut to the door. The wound that must be cut
No wise physician will attempt to heal
With incantation, elegy, or song.

The rest be bury'd with me. The custom of burying the arms of deceased warriors in the same grave with them is very antient, and is practised amongst the Indians at this day. This whole speech of Ajax, it is observed by the commentators, carries with it the air and form of his last will and testament; he gives orders to his wife and family as a man immediately about to quit the world: this raises the passion of pity in the spectators, and prepares them for the catastrophe.

Incantation, elegy, and song. The Greek word επωδη is here used by Sophocles for a charm or incantation, a method of curing diseases frequently made use of by the antients.

CHORUS.

I tremble when I hear thee threat'ning thus
With sharp and piercing voice.

TECMESSA.

Alas! my lord,
What wilt thou do?

AJAX.

Guess not; inquire not of me;
Be silent, and be wise; it will become thee.

TECMESSA.

How am I tortur'd! by the Gods I beg thee,
By our dear child, do not destroy us both.

AJAX.

Thou dost perplex me; why revere the Gods?
I am not bound to't, for I owe them nothing.

TECMESSA.

Be not so impious.

AJAX.

Talk to those will hear thee.

TECMESSA.

Art thou resolv'd then?

AJAX.

'Tis too much; thy grief
Grows troublesome.

TECMESSA.

Alas! my lord, I fear——

AJAX *(to the* CHORUS.)

Will ye not take her hence?

TECMESSA.

O! by the Gods
I beg thee, be persuaded.

AJAX.

Thou art mad
To think thy words will ever change my purpose.

[*Exeunt.*

Change my purpose. Ajax, we must here suppose, breaks from Tecmessa, and retires; she goes out, and the Chorus remains on the stage to lament their own unhappy condition, and express their fears for Ajax.

O D E.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

O happiest, best abode, my native isle,
Fair Salamis, encompass'd by the sea,
On thee whilst Gods and men indulgent smile,
My country, O behold and pity me!
A long long time on Ida's plain,
Thus doom'd inglorious to remain,
While circling years roll o'er my wretched head:
New terrors still affright me here,
Still is my heart appall'd with fear,
Lest I should visit soon the mansions of the dead.

ANTISTROPHE.

The woes of Ajax too imbitter mine,
The bravest leader of the Grecian host,
Untimely visited by wrath divine,
And in the desp'rate cruel frenzy lost.
There was a time when sent by thee
He gain'd the wreath of victory,
Tho' now his weeping friends lament his fall:
Th' ungrateful chiefs revere no more
The virtues they admir'd before;
His gallant deeds are now forgotten all.

STROPHE II.

Weigh'd down with years, when thou in hoary age
Unhappy mother, shalt these tidings hear
Of thy dear Ajax, and his cruel rage,
How wilt thou weep and wail with grief sincere!
Not like the plaintive nightingale
That warbles sweet her tender tale,
But with loud shrieks of horrible despair:
With sharpest anguish sore oppress'd,
Then shalt thou beat thy aged breast,
And in deep sorrow rend thy wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.

'Tis better far to die than, hopeless still
Of cure, to languish under sore disease;
When mortals suffer such distinguish'd ill
The silent tomb is liberty and ease.
Ajax, the pride of all our host,
His antient fame and glory lost,
Sinks down at last o'erwhelm'd with foul disgrace:
How will his hapless father bear
His son's distressful fate to hear,
Ev'n such as never fell on Æacus his race!

ACT III.

SCENE I.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX.

STILL are the secret things of man reveal'd,
And what is known again in darkness hid
By endless and immeasurable time;
And nothing is there but in length of days
May come to pass; ev'n sacred oaths are broken,
And the fix'd mind, perverse and obstinate,
Subdu'd by time: I, who like harden'd steel
Was late inflexible, am soften'd now
To pity and remorse by this dear woman;
I cannot bear to leave her here a widow
Amidst her foes, or to forsake my child,
A helpless orphan: No; I will retire

Act 3. Brumoy, in opposition to all the critics, translators, and commentators, and without assigning any reason, extends this act to the end of the next chorus, and begins the third with the arrival of the messenger from Teucer; which makes the division of the acts very unequal, the second containing, in the original, upwards of five hundred lines, and in the third not above one; but as I observed in the dissertation, the custom of mincing the antient tragedy into five acts is merely arbitrary, and without any foundation, as it was, most probably, one continued act extending itself through the whole Drama.

Along the shore, and seek the running stream,
Avert the wrath of angry heav'n, and wash
My crimes away: there haply shall I find
Some unfrequented spot where I may hide
This fatal weapon, this destructive sword:
O! I will bury't deep in earth, that none
May see it more, but night and Erebus
Preserve it still from ev'ry mortal eye.
E'er since that hapless day, when from the hand
Of Hector I receiv'd this dreadful boon,
Nought have I had from Greece but pain and woe:
True is the adage, "from the hands of foes
Gifts are not gifts, but injuries most fatal."
Hereafter will I yield me to the Gods
And the Atridæ; since they are my masters,
'Tis meet that I obey them: all that's strong
And mighty must submit to pow'rs superior:
Doth not the snowy winter to the bloom
Of fruitful summer yield? and night obscure,
When by white steeds Aurora drawn lights up
The rising day, submissively retire?
The roaring sea, long vext by angry winds,
Is lull'd by milder zephyrs to repose,
And oft the fetters of all-conqu'ring sleep
Are kindly loos'd to free the captive mind;
From nature then, who thus instructs mankind,
Why should not Ajax learn humility?
Long since I knew to treat my foe like one
Whom I hereafter as a friend might love
If he deserved it, and to love my friend

This fatal weapon. Ajax, who is secretly resolved to destroy himself, says this to prevent the suspicions of his wife and friends from his carrying his sword out with him: the spectators plainly see his intent by his industry to conceal it.

Long since I knew, &c. Tully in his Lælius, sive de Amicitia, disclaims this selfish and worldly maxim, as destructive to all friendship. The saying is generally attributed to the celebrated Bias, one of the seven sages of Greece.

As if he still might one day be my foe:
For little is the trust we can repose
In human friendships: but to my intent;
Go thou, Tecmessa, and beseech the Gods
To grant what I request: do you perform
The same kind office; and when Teucer comes,
Tell him, the care of me and all my friends
I leave to him: whither I must, I must:
Obey my orders: wretched as I am
Soon shall ye see me freed from all my woes. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Now let sounds of mirth and joy
Ev'ry blissful hour employ:
Borne on pleasure's airy wing
Io Pan! to thee we sing:
Thee, whom on the rocky shore
Wreck-scap'd mariners adore,
Skill'd the mazy dance to lead,
Teach, O! teach our feet to tread
The round which Cretan Cnossus knows,
At Nyssa which spontaneous rose;
Pan, O! guide this tuneful throng,
While to thee we raise the song,
From Cyllene's snowy brow,
King of pleasures, hear us now!
From thy mountains, O! appear!
Joy and happiness are here:

Soon shall ye see me, &c. The expression, we may observe, is ambiguous, and the sense left doubtful on purpose to deceive the Chorus, who, misunderstanding him, immediately on his leaving them break out into a song of joy on his recovery. This besides (as the commentators have remarked) gives time for Ajax to retire before the arrival of the messenger.

And do thou, O! Delian king,
Now thy aid propitious bring!
O! from the Icarian sea
Come, Apollo, smile on me.

ANTISTROPHE.

All our sorrows now are o'er,
Grief and madness are no more:
See, the happy day appears,
Mighty Jove! that ends our fears;
Let us, free from ev'ry care,
Gladly to our ships repair:
Ajax now in sweet repose
Sinks, forgetful of his woes;
Humbly to the Gods resign'd,
He devotes his better mind:
Time that withers can restore
Human pleasures; now no more
Must we say our vows are vain;
Nought unhop'd for shou'd remain;
Since, beyond our wishes, see
Ajax from his madness free;
'Gainst th' Atridæ all his rage
See how milder thoughts assuage,
Bitter strife and quarrels cease;
All is harmony and peace.

SCENE III.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

My Friends, I bear you news of highest import;
From Mysia's rocky mountains hither comes
The noble Teucer; know, e'en now I saw him
Amid the Grecian host, who, as he came,
Surrounded, and on ev'ry side pour'd forth
Reproaches on him; not a man but cry'd
"Behold the brother of that frantic foe,
To Greece and to her council:" such their rage

That they had well-nigh ston'd him ; swords were drawn,
And dire had been the conflict, but that some
Among the aged chiefs by calm advice
Appeas'd the strife : but where is Ajax gone ?
That I may tell him : from our masters nought
Shou'd be conceal'd.

CHORUS.

He is not now within,
But just steps forth, as if on some new act
Intent, well-suited to his better mind.

MESSENGER.

Alas ! too late did Teucer send me here,
Or I am come too slowly.

CHORUS.

Why regret
His absence thus ?

MESSENGER.

'Twas Teucer's strict command
He shou'd be kept within the tent, nor stir
Till he arriv'd.

CHORUS.

But, to his sense restor'd,
He went to deprecate the wrath divine
And expiate his offence.

MESSENGER.

Thy words are vain,
If Chalcas prophecy aright.

CHORUS.

What then
Did Chalcas say ? Dost thou know aught of this?

MESSENGER.

Thus far I know, for I was witness of it:
Chalcas, retiring from th' assembled chiefs
Apart from the Atridæ, gently press'd
The hand of Teucer, and in tend'rest friendship
Besought him that by ev'ry human art
And means to be devis'd, he wou'd prevent

Ajax his wand'ring forth this fatal day,
If he did ever wish to see him more:
This day alone, he said, Minerva's wrath
Wou'd last against him; oft the mighty fall
In deep Affliction, smit by angry heav'n,
When, mortal-born, to human laws they yield not
As mortals ought, submissively: thus spake
The Prophet, and long since was Ajax deem'd
To have a mind disturb'd: when first he left
His native soil, be conqu'ror, O! my child,
His father said, but conquer under God;
Impious and proud his answer was; "the worst
"Of men (he cried) assisted by the Gods
"May conquer, I shall do the work without them;"
Such were his boastings: and when Pallas once
With kind assistance urg'd him to the fight,
Dreadful and horrible was his reply;
"Go, queen, to other Grecians lend thy aid,
"'Tis needless here; for know, where Ajax is
"The foe will never come:" by words like these,
And pride ill-suited to a mortal's pow'r,
Did he offend the vengeful deity;
But if he lives, we may preserve him still,
The Gods assisting; so the prophet spake;
And Teucer bade me say, you all shou'd try
To keep him here; but if that cannot be,
And Chalcas judge aright, he is no more.

CHORUS (*to* TECMESSA *within.*)

What ho! Tecmessa, most unhappy woman!
Come forth and hear the tidings that he brings,
They wound us deep, and all our joys are gone.

SCENE IV.

TECMESSA, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

TECMESSA.

Scarce do I breathe from still-repeated woes,
And now again thou call'st me; wherefore? speak.

CHORUS.

This messenger hath brought us dreadful news
Concerning Ajax: hear him.

TECMESSA.

O! what is it?
Am I undone?

MESSENGER.

I know not what thou art;
But if thy Ajax be gone forth, my fears
Are great for him.

TECMESSA.

Alas! he is; but, why?
How thou afflict'st me!

MESSENGER.

Teucer hath forbade
His wand'ring thus alone.

TECMESSA.

But why forbade him?
And where is Teucer?

MESSENGER.

He will soon be here;
He fears this fatal Day.

TECMESSA.

Undone Tecmessa!
Whence are his fears? who told him 'twou'd be fatal?

MESSENGER.

Thestorian Chalcas did foretel, this day
To life or death wou'd fix the fate of Ajax.

TECMESSA *(to the* CHORUS.*)*

Assist me, friends, in this distressful hour.
To Teucer haste, and bring him to my aid;
Some to yon western mountain bend your way,
And some to th' east; find out which path he went:
Unhappy wand'rer! O! he has deceiv'd me,
His former love forgotten all and gone!
What must we do, my child? I must not sit
Inactive here; no, wheresoe'er I can

I'll go to search him : let us haste, my friends,
Quick, fly this instant, if we mean to save
The wretched Ajax, rushing on destruction.

CHORUS.

Behold us ready, not in word alone,
But bent with speed to follow thee. Away.

[*Exeunt.*

A C T IV.

SCENE I.

AJAX.

THERE stands my sword, and fix'd as it may best
Perform its office; 'twas the gift of Hector,
My worst of foes, whom I detested ever :
The steel-devouring stone hath sharpen'd well
Its keenest edge; bury'd in Trojan earth
It lies, and now in kindness seems prepar'd
To end my wretched life ; thus far is well :
And now, O! Jove, for first to thee 'tis fit
We pay due honours, I address my pray'r ;
I ask not much ; I ask thee but to send
Some passing stranger here to bear the news
Of my unhappy fate to Teucer's ear,
That he may first behold, and take me hence,
Lest by my foes discover'd, I be cast
A prey to dogs and birds ; forbid it, Jove!
Thee too, great leader of departed souls,
Terrestrial Hermes, thee I call, O! hear me ;
With easy steps, and swift, conduct me safe
To my abode, soon as this fatal sword
Shall reach my breast ; and you, ye virgin pow'rs,
From whom whate'er befals of human ill
Cannot be hid, ye goddesses rever'd,
Swift to pursue the guilty, O! behold
The wretched Ajax by th' Atridæ fall!

O! seize the murd'rers! by my own sad hand
As I shall perish, let my foes be slain
By those whom most they love! quick, fly, begone,
Ye vengeful furies, gorge yourselves in blood,
Nor spare a man of all the Grecian host;
And thou, O! Sun, who driv'st the flaming car
Along the vaulted sky, when thou shalt see
My native soil, O! stop thy golden reins;
Tell the sad story to my hapless sire,
And my afflicted mother; when she hears
The mournful tale, her grief will fill the land
With dreadful lamentations: but 'tis vain
To weep my fate: the business must be done.
O! Death, look on me, Death; I come to thee:
Soon shall we meet: but thee, O! glorious day,
And yon bright charioteer the sun, no more
Shall I behold, e'en now thou hear'st my last
My dying words: O! light, O! sacred soil
Of Salamis, my country, and her gods,
O! noble Athens, O! my lov'd companions,
Ye rivers, fountains, and fair fields of Troy,
And you my honour'd parents, O! farewell!
'Tis the last word Ajax shall speak on earth;
The rest be utter'd to the shades below.

[AJAX *falls on his sword and dies.*

SCENE II.

CHORUS.

SEMICHORUS I.

Labour on labour! toil on toil! O whither
Have we not wander'd? yet no place informs us
Where Ajax is: but soft, I hear a voice.

The Chorus who had been in search of Ajax enter at different parts of the stage, having divided themselves into two parts, the better to discover him; they meet as it were by chance, and ask each other concerning him.

SEMICHORUS II.

'Twas ours, your friends.

SEMICHORUS I.

What news?

SEMICHORUS II.

We've search'd along
The western shore.

SEMICHORUS I.

And is he found?

SEMICHORUS II.

Alas!
We met with nought but toil; no sight of him.

SEMICHORUS I.

We from the east return with like success;
For none have seen or heard of him that way.

SEMICHORUS II.

Who will inform us? who will say
Where cruel Ajax bent his way?
Will not the watchful hind, who void of sleep
Hangs laborious o'er the deep?
From high Olympus will no pitying god,
Will no kind Naiad of the flood,
If chance they see the cruel Ajax stray,
Tell us where he bent his way?
For O! 'tis dreadful, wearied thus, to rove,
Whilst all our pains successless prove
To reach the destin'd goal, or find the man we love.

TECMESSA *(from within.)*

Alas! alas!

SEMICHORUS I.

Hark! from the neighb'ring grove
I heard a voice.

SEMICHORUS II.

It is the wretched captive,
The wife of Ajax, the poor sad Tecmessa.

SCENE III.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECMESSA.

O! I am lost, my Friends, undone, destroy'd!

CHORUS.

Ha! what hath happen'd?

TECMESSA.

Ajax lies before me,
Slain by the sword which he had bury'd here.

CHORUS.

Fatal sure was our return,
Thy untimely death to mourn,
Me, and all thy faithful train,
Cruel Ajax, hast thou slain,
Sad event, alas! to me!
Sadder, woman, still to thee.

TECMESSA.

O! I have reason now to weep indeed.

CHORUS.

What hand perform'd the horrid deed?

TECMESSA.

His own,
Doubtless it was, the sword he fell upon,
Here, fix'd in earth, declares it must be so.

CHORUS *(approaching towards the Body.)*

Alone without one pitying Friend,
Cam'st thou to this dreadful end;

O! I am lost, &c. Tecmessa, as well as the Chorus, alarmed by the prophecy of Chalcas as recounted by the Messenger, had been in search of her husband, and on her return stumbles on his body; the Chorus, we must suppose, are at the forepart of the stage, and Tecmessa at the back, in the place where Ajax had fallen upon his sword. The Chorus here, agreeable to what I have before observed was customary in the impassioned parts of the drama, sing in strophe and antistrophe: I therefore put it into rhyme, the better to distinguish it.

Was I not myself to blame,
Who neglectful never came?
Bring him, Tecmessa, to my eyes,
Tell me, where thy Ajax lies.

TECMESSA.

He is not to be seen: this folded garment
Shall hide the horrid sight: a sight no friend
Wou'd wish to see: whilst from his nostrils streams
The black blood, more still issuing from the wound,
Made by his own destructive hand: O me!
What must I do? what friend will raise him up?
O! where is Teucer? he shou'd have been here
To pay his last sad duty to a brother:
O! wretched Ajax! but to think, alas!
What once thou hast been, and what now thou art,
Thy very foes must sure lament thy fate.

CHORUS.

Ajax, long since in thy obdurate mind,
Thy sad purpose was design'd;
Long since wert thou resolv'd to seek repose
From thy never ceasing woes;
This from the daily sigh, the nightly tear,
This from thy sorrows did I fear;
This from thy hate which nought cou'd e'er assuage;
And 'gainst th' Atridæ all thy rage:
For never did thy soul contentment know,
But still with fiercest indignation glow,
Since great Achilles' arms were given to thy foe.

TECMESSA.

O! me!

CHORUS.

Alas! I know the wound must pierce
Thy inmost soul.

TECMESSA.

Unhappy lost Tecmessa!

CHORUS.

O! I believe thou art indeed unhappy,

Bereav'd of such a friend.

TECMESSA.

Thou but believ'st it,
I am too certain; for I feel it here.

CHORUS.

I know thou dost.

TECMESSA.

What servitude, my child,
Must we endure? who will protect us now?

CHORUS.

Doubtless thy fear of future pain,
From the Atridæ all are vain,
For never can they mean such ills to thee;
Unfeeling they of human woe,
Nor love nor piety cou'd know;
May heav'n avert the sad calamity!

TECMESSA.

The Gods ordain'd it, and it must be so.

CHORUS.

But he hath suffer'd more than he deserv'd.

TECMESSA.

Jove's dreadful daughter Pallas so decreed
His fate, to gratify her lov'd Ulysses.

CHORUS.

Ulysses, ever pleas'd to see
His madness, now will smile at thee,
Will laugh at Ajax' woes, nor pity thine:
By him the curst Atridæ led,
Perhaps will triumph o'er the dead,
And in the cruel mirth with pleasure join.

TECMESSA.

Let them rejoice, let them insult him now
With savage joy, but when the dreadful day
Of battle comes, whom living they despis'd,
When dead they shall lament: fools never know
The treasure's value, till the treasure's lost:
But far more bitter was his death to me

Then sweet to them: to Ajax 'twas most welcome;
Death was his only wish, and he obtain'd it:
Then wherefore shou'd they triumph? by the hand
Of heav'n, and not by theirs my Ajax fell.
Then let Ulysses smile: he is not theirs,
He lives not for the Grecians; he is gone,
And has bequeath'd his sorrows all to me.

SCENE IV.

TEUCER, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

Alas! alas!

CHORUS.

Hark! 'tis the voice of Teucer
In mournful sighs lamenting our sad fate.

TEUCER.

O! Ajax, is it so? my dearest brother,
Dear as these eyes to me, hath fame said true,
And art thou gone?

CHORUS.

O! Teucer, he is dead.

TEUCER.

Unhappy fate!

CHORUS.

'Tis so indeed.

TEUCER.

Alas!
Wretch that I am.

CHORUS.

O! thou hast cause to weep.

TEUCER.

Dreadful calamity!

CHORUS.

It is indeed
Too much to bear.

TEUCER.

O! wretched, wretched Teucer!
Where is the child? is he at Troy?

CHORUS.

Alone,
And in the tent.

TEUCER.

Will ye not bring him to me,
Lest he shou'd fall a victim to the foe?
Ev'n as the hunters seize the lion's whelp
Left to its helpless dam: quick! fly! assist me,
For all are glad to triumph o'er the dead.

CHORUS.

To thee, O! Teucer, he bequeath'd the care
Of his lov'd child, and thou obey'st him well.

TEUCER.

O Ajax! never did these eyes behold
A sight so dreadful; came I then for this
With luckless speed? O! melancholy journey!
To seek thee long in vain, and thus at last
To find thee dead before me, O! my brother!
Quick through the Grecian host, as if some god
Had brought the tidings, spread the dire report
Of thy untimely fate; far from thee then
I heard and wept, but now, alas! I see
And am undone; my best, my dearest Ajax!
Unveil the body; let me view it well,
And count my mis'ries; horrid spectacle!
O! rash advent'rous deed! what weight of woe
Thy death has laid on me! alas! to whom
Or whither shall I go? O! wherefore, Teucer,
Wert thou not here to stop a brother's hand?
What will our poor unhappy father say,
The wretched Telamon, will he receive me
With looks of love and pleasure, when I come
Without his Ajax? O! he never will.
Ev'n in the best of times he was not wont

To smile, or joy in aught. What then will now
His anger vent? will he not speak of me
As of a faithless base unworthy son,
The spurious offspring of a captive mother,
Who hath betray'd and slain his best-lov'd Ajax
To gain his fair possessions after death?
Thus will his wrath, sharpen'd by peevish age,
Upbraid me guiltless; and to slav'ry doom'd
A wretched exile from his native land
Shall Teucer wander forth: such dreadful ills
Must I expect at home: at Troy, my foes
Are num'rous, and my friends alas! how few!
Thou art the cause of all: for O! my Ajax,
What shall I do? how can I save thee now
From this sad fate? O! who could have foreseen
That Hector, long since dead, at last should prove
The murderer of Ajax? By the gods
I do beseech you, mark the fate of both:
The belt, which Ajax did to Hector give,
Dragg'd the brave Trojan o'er the bloody field
Till he expir'd; and now, behold! the sword,
Which Hector gave to Ajax, is the cause
Of Ajax' death: Erynnis' self did forge
The fatal steel, and Pluto made the belt;
Dreadful artificer! But this, and all
That happens to us, is the work of heav'n.
If there be those who doubt it, let them hold
Their diff'ring judgements, I shall keep my own.

CHORUS.

Teucer, no more; but rather now prepare
To bury Ajax, and defend thyself
Against thy foe, whom yonder I behold
This way advancing, with malignant smile,
And looks of ill intent.

TEUCER.

Who can it be?
From th' army, think'st thou?

CHORUS.

'Tis the man whose cause
We came to fight, e'en Menelaus.

TEUCER.

'Tis so.
As he approaches nigh, I know him well.

SCENE V.

MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

MENELAUS.

Stop there; to thee I speak; let go the body,
I will not have it touch'd.

TEUCER.

Why touch it not?

MENELAUS.

Because it is my will, and his who leads
The Grecian host.

TEUCER.

But wherefore is it so?

MENELAUS.

Greece fondly hoped that she had brought a friend,
And firm ally, but by experience found
That Troy herself was not so much our foe
As Ajax was, who nightly wander'd forth
With deadliest rage to murder all our host,
And, but some god did frustrate his intent,
The fate himself hath met had been our own;
Then had he triumph'd; but the gods ordain'd
It shou'd not be; and 'gainst the flocks and herds
Turn'd all his fury: wherefore, know, there lives not
A man of courage or of pow'r sufficient
To bury Ajax: on the yellow shore
He shall he cast, to be the food of birds
That wander there: thou may'st resent it too,
But 'twill be vain; at least we will command
When dead, whom living we cou'd ne'er subdue,

Nor ask thy leave: he never wou'd submit,
But now he must: yield therefore, or we force thee.
'Tis the Plebeian's duty to obey
The voice of those who bear authority,
And he who doth not is the worst of men;
For never can the state itself support
By wholesome laws, where there is no submission:
An army's best defence is modest fear
And rev'rence of its leaders; without these
It cannot conquer: it becomes a man
How great soe'er his strength, still to remember
A little, very little, may destroy him.
He who is guarded by humility
And conscious shame, alone in safety lies;
But where licentious freedom and reproach
Injurious reign, each as his will directs
Still acting, know, that city soon must fall
From all its bliss, and sink in deepest woe.
Remember then, respect is due to me.
Let us not think when pleasure is enjoy'd
We must not suffer too and taste of pain;
For these to mortals still alternate rise.
There liv'd not one so proud and arrogant
As Ajax was: I will be haughty now;
It is my turn: take heed then, touch him not,
Lest, while thou striv'st to bury him, thyself
Shou'd drop into the tomb.

CHORUS.

O! Menelaus,
Do not with maxims grave, and wisdom's rules
Mix foul reproach and slander on the dead.

TEUCER.

It shou'd not move our wonder, O! my friend,
To see the vulgar err, of meaner souls,
And birth obscure, when men so nobly born,
Will talk thus basely: tell me, Menelaus,
For 'twas thy first assertion, didst thou bring

Our Ajax here to help the Grecian host,
Or came he hither by himself alone
Conducted? whence is thy command o'er him,
Or these his followers? who gave thee pow'r,
Who gave thee right? thou may'st be Sparta's king,
But art not ours: Ajax was bound by law
No more to thee than thou wert bound to Ajax;
Thyself no gen'ral, but to others here
Subjected, therefore lord it where thou may'st;
Command thy slaves, go threaten, and chastise them;
But I will bury Ajax, spite of thee,
And of thy brother, for I heed thee not:
He sail'd not here to quarrel for the wife
Of Menelaus, like a hireling slave,
But to fulfill the strictly-binding oath
Which he had sworn; he did not come for thee;
For he despis'd so poor a cause; he came
With all his heralds, and a num'rous train,
And brought his captains too; remember therefore
Thy clamours ne'er shall turn me from my purpose
Whilst thou art what thou art.

MENELAUS.

A tongue like thine
But ill becomes thy state: 'tis most unseemly.

TEUCER.

A keen reproach, with justice on its side,
Is always grating.

MENELAUS.

This proud archer here

Strictly-binding oath, &c. Tyndarus, the father of the fair Helen, obliged all his daughter's lovers to take an oath, that on which of them soever the happy lot should fall to marry her, the rest should unite in his defence, and, in case of any attempt to carry her off, should join their forces to recover her. The event justified the necessity of this oath. Teucer therefore tells Menelaus, that it was not any personal regard to him which induced Ajax to join the army, but his resolution to fulfill this solemn engagement.

This proud archer, &c. The foot soldiers among the Grecians, were di-

Talks loudly.

TEUCER.

'Tis no mean illib'ral art.

MENELAUS.

If thou could'st bear a shield, how insolent
And haughty would'st thou be! when naked thus,
Thou boast'st thy valour.

TEUCER.

Naked as I am
I shou'd not fly from thee with all thy arms.

MENELAUS.

Thy tongue but speaks thy pride.

TEUCER.

I shou'd be proud
When I am just.

MENELAUS.

Doth justice bid me love
Him who destroy'd me?

TEUCER.

Art thou then destroy'd?
That's strange indeed, living and dead at once.

MENELAUS.

For him I had been so: the gods preserv'd me.

TEUCER.

Do not dishonour then the pow'rs divine
That sav'd thee.

MENELAUS.

Do I violate their laws?

vided into the ψιλοι and the ὁπλιται. The ὁπλιται, or armed soldiers, bore heavy armour, engaging with broad shields, and long spears: whereas the ψιλοι or light armed men fought with arrows, and darts, or sometimes stones and slings, annoying their enemies at a distance, like our modern Indians, but unfit for close fight; these, to which Teucer belonged, were inferior in honour and dignity to the heavy-armed soldiers; Menelaus therefore reproaches him as a man of no rank, alluding probably to the custom among the ψιλοι of shooting their arrows, and then retiring behind the shields of the heavy-armed for protection. Homer, whom Sophocles never loses sight of, describes Teucer acting in this manner. See the 8th book of the Iliad.

TEUCER.

If thou forbid'st the burial of the dead
Thou dost offend the gods.

MENELAUS.

He was my foe,
And therefore I forbid it.

TEUCER.

Art thou sure
That Ajax ever was thy foe?

MENELAUS.

I am:
Our hate was mutual, and thou know'st the cause.

TEUCER.

Because thou wert corrupted, thy false voice
Condemn'd him.

MENELAUS.

'Twas the judges' fault, not mine.

TEUCER.

Thus may'st thou screen a thousand injuries.

MENELAUS.

Some one may suffer for this insolence.

TEUCER.

Not more perhaps than others.

MENELAUS.

This alone
Remember, bury'd he shall never be.

TEUCER.

Do thou remember too, I say, he shall.

MENELAUS.

So have I seen a bold imperious man
With froward tongue, before the storm began,
Urging the tardy mariner to sail,
But when the tempest rose, no more was heard

Thy false voice, &c. The Scholiasts on this place inform us, that in the famous contest between Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles, the former lost them by the casting vote of Menelaus.

The coward's voice, but wrapt beneath his cloak
Silent he laid, and suffer'd ev'ry foot
To trample on him; thus it is with thee,
And thy foul tongue: forth from a little cloud
Soon as the storm shall burst, it will o'erwhelm thee,
And stop thy clamours.

TEUCER.

I too have beheld
A man with folly swol'n reproach his friends
Oppress'd with sore calamity, when straight
One came like me, with indignation fir'd,
Saw, and address'd him thus, "Cease, shameless wretch,
" Nor thus oppress the dead; for, if thou dost,
" Remember thou shalt suffer for thy crime:"
Thus spoke he to the weak insulting fool;
Methinks I see him here; it must be he,
E'en Menelaus; have I guess'd aright?

MENELAUS.

'Tis well; I'll leave thee: 'tis a folly thus
To talk with those whom we have pow'r to punish.

[*Exit.*

SCENE VI.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

Away, this babbler is not to be borne.

CHORUS.

The contest will grow warm: O! Teucer, haste,
Prepare some hollow foss for the remains
Of Ajax, raise him there a monument,
By after ages ne'er to be forgotten.

Weak insulting fool, &c. There is something in the raillery of this scene which will probably appear very rough, when compared with the refinement of modern manners: The heroes of Sophocles, like those of Homer, are not remarkable for their delicacy. " Il faut convenir (says Brumoy) que les héros Grecs se traitent un peu à la Grecque, c'est " à-dire, assez incivilement; mais telle étoit la maniere d'une nation " d'ailleurs si polie; cela n'est pas pour nous plaire aujourd'hui."

TEUCER.

And, lo! in happy hour this way advancing
The wife and son of our unhappy friend,
To pay due honours, and adorn his tomb.

SCENE VII.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

Come hither, boy, bend down and touch thy father;
There sit, and holding in thy hands this hair
And hers and thine, the suppliant's humble treasure,
Offer thy pious prayers for thy dead father:
If from yon hostile camp the foe shou'd come
To drive thee hence, far from his native land,
Whoe'er he be, unbury'd may he lie,
From his whole race uprooted, torn away,
E'en as this hair which here I cut before thee;
O! guard it well, my child, and you my friends,
Behave like men, assist, protect him now,
Till I return, and, spite of all our foes,
Perform the rites, and raise a tomb to Ajax. [*Exit.*

SCENE VIII.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

When will the happy hour appear,
That comes to calm our ev'ry fear,
From endless toil to bring us sweet repose,

Holding in thy hands, &c. It was customary among the Grecians on the death of friends or relations to tear and cut off their hair to throw it on the dead body, or sometimes into the funeral pile, with a design to render the ghost of the deceased person propitious, as well as to shew their grief for the loss of him: we find Electra performing this ceremony in honour of Orestes, whom she supposed dead.

Scene VIII. Menelaus goes out with an intention, we must suppose, to bring back with him a proper force to secure the execution of his

To bid our weary wand'rings cease,
To fold us in the arms of peace,
And put the wish'd-for period to our woes?
For since the day when first to Troy we came,
Nought have we known but grief, reproach, and shame.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O! that the man, who erst inspir'd
With horrid rage, our Grecians fir'd
To slaught'rous deeds, and taught them first to fight,
E'er he had learn'd the dreadful trade,
Himself had mingled with the dead,
Or scatter'd wide in air, or sunk in endless night!
For O! from war unnumber'd evils flow,
The inexhausted source of ev'ry human woe.

STROPHE II.

By war disturb'd the genial board
No longer will its sweets afford;
Their fragrant odours round my head
The verdant wreaths no longer spread;
Nor music's charms my soul delight,
Nor love with rapture crowns the night;
No love, alas! for me, but grief and care;
For when I think of Troy I still despair,
And wet with many a tear my wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Nor nightly fear nor hostile dart
Whilst Ajax liv'd, appall'd my heart,
But all our pleasures now are o'er,
The valiant Ajax is no more:
O cou'd I climb the woody steep
That hangs incumbent o'er the deep,
From Sunium's cliff by waves for ever beat!
Thence shou'd my eye the lovely prospect greet,
And smile on sacred Athens rising at my feet.

orders, which Teucer had treated with contempt; Teucer retires to find out a proper place for the interment of Ajax, and leaves Tecmessa and Eurysaces weeping over the body: the Chorus sing a pathetic dirge, lamenting the miseries of war, and their own unhappy condition.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

TEUCER, AGAMEMNON, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

This way I bent my hasty steps to meet
The Grecian chief, who hither comes prepar'd
To vent his keen reproaches.

AGAMEMNON.

I am told
That thou, e'en thou, the son of a vile slave,
Hast dar'd to utter foulest calumny
Against thy prince, and pass'd unpunish'd for it;
Mean as thy birth is, what had been thy pride
And high demeanor, had thy mother sprung
From noble blood? barbarian as thou art,
How could'st thou praise a wretch, who, like thyself,
Was nothing? we, it seems, for thou hast sworn it,
Are not the masters or of Greece or thee;
Ajax alone, thou say'st, was leader here.
Shall we be thus insulted by our slaves?
Who is this boaster? and what mighty deed
Hath he perform'd which I cou'd not have done?
Is there no Hero in the Grecian host
But Ajax? Vain indeed were our resolves
In the warm contest for Achilles' arms,
If Teucer yet shall question the decree,
Against the gen'ral voice; resisting still,
And still reproachful, with delusive arts,
Tho' conquer'd, yet opposing: wholesome laws
Will nought avail, if those whom justice deems
Superior, to the vanquish'd must resign,
And first in virtue be the last in fame;
It must not be: not always the huge size

Of weighty limbs ensures the victory;
They who excel in wisdom are alone
Invincible: thou see'st the brawny ox
How the small whip will drive him thro' the field;
What if the med'cine be applied to thee
For thy proud boasting, and licentious tongue!
'Twill be thy portion soon, unless thou learn'st
More wisdom; henceforth, mindful what thou art,
Bring with thee one of nobler blood to plead
Thy cause; for know, the language which thou talk'st
Is barb'rous, and I understand thee not.

CHORUS.

I can but wish that wisdom may attend
To guide you both.

TEUCER.

Alas! how very soon
Are all the merits of the dead forgotten!
O! Ajax, is the memory of thee
Already lost, e'en by the man for whom
Thy life so oft was ventur'd in the field?
But now 'tis past, and buried in oblivion:
Thou wordy sland'rer! can'st thou not remember
When, baffled and unequal to the foe,
Close pent within the walls our forces lay;
Can'st thou not call to mind who came alone
To your deliv'rance, when devouring flames
Tow'r'd o'er our ships, when Hector leap'd the foss
And rush'd amongst us? then who fought for Greece,
Who drove him back but Ajax, who, thou say'st,
Cou'd never fight? did he not fight for you?
He met the noble Hector hand to hand,
Unbidden dar'd the fortune of the field;
He scorn'd the coward's art to fix his lot
In the moist earth; forth from the crested helmet
It sprang the first: such were the deeds of Ajax,
And I was witness of them; I, the slave,
For so thou call'st me, sprung from a barbarian:

How dares a wretch like thee to talk of birth!
Who was thy grandsire? can'st thou not remember
That old barbarian, Phrygian Pelops, tell me:
Who was thy father, Atreus, was he not?
That worst of men, who at a brother's table
Serv'd up his children, horrible repast!
Thy mother too a Cretan, and a slave;
A vile adultress, whom thy father caught
And headlong cast into the sea: shalt thou
Talk then to me of birth, to me, the son
Of valiant Telamon, renown'd in war,
And wedded to a queen, the royal race
Of great Laomedon, and fairest gift
Of fam'd Alcides? thus of noble blood
From either parent sprung, shall I disgrace
The man whom thou, inhuman, would'st still keep
Unbury'd here? dost thou not blush to think on't?
But, mark me well; if thou dost cast him forth,
Not he alone inglorious on the plain
Shall lie, together we will perish all:
To die with glory in a brother's cause
Is better far than fighting for the wife
Of Agamemnon, or of Menelaus:
For thy own sake, and not for mine, remember
If thou provoke me, thou'lt be sorry for it,
And wish thou'dst rather fear'd than anger'd Teucer.

SCENE II.

ULYSSES, AGAMEMNON, MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Ulysses, if thou mean'st not to inflame,
But to compose this dreadful strife, thou com'st
In happiest hour.

ULYSSES.

Far off I heard the voice
Of the Atridæ o'er this wretched corse;
Whence rose the clamour, friends?

MENELAUS.

With bitt'rest words
This Teucer here, Ulysses, has revil'd me.

ULYSSES.

What words? for if he heard the same from thee,
I blame him not.

AGAMEMNON.

He did provoke me to it.

ULYSSES.

What inj'ry hath he done thee?

AGAMEMNON.

He declares
The body shall have sepulture, himself
Perforce will bury Ajax, spite of me,
And of my pow'r.

ULYSSES.

Shall I be free, and speak
The truth to thee, without reproach or blame?

AGAMEMNON.

Thou may'st; for well thou know'st I hold Ulysses
Of all the Greeks my best and dearest friend.

ULYSSES.

Then hear me, by the gods I must intreat thee,
Do not, remorseless and inhuman, cast
The body forth unbury'd, nor permit
Authority to trample thus on justice.
E'er since our contest for Achilles' arms,
Hath Ajax been my foe, and yet I scorn
To use him basely; e'en Ulysses owns
Of all the Grecian chiefs who came from Troy
(Except Achilles) Ajax was the bravest.
Do not deny him then the honours due
To worth so great; for know it were a crime

Not against him alone but 'gainst the gods,
A violation of the laws divine.
To hurt the brave and virtuous after death,
E'en tho' he liv'd thy foe, is infamous.

AGAMEMNON.

Plead'st thou for Ajax?

ULYSSES.

Yes; I was his foe
Whilst justice would permit me; but he's dead;
Therefore thou should'st not triumph nor rejoice
With mirth unseemly o'er a vanquish'd man.

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis not so easy for a king to act
By honour's strictest rules.

ULYSSES.

'Tis always so,
To hearken to the counsels of a friend,
When he advises well.

AGAMEMNON.

But know, the good
And virtuous still submit to those who rule.

ULYSSES.

No more: when thou art vanquish'd by thy friends,
Thou art thyself the conqu'ror.

AGAMEMNON.

Still remember
For whom thou plead'st, Ulysses.

ULYSSES.

For a foe,
But for a brave one.

AGAMEMNON.

Dost thou thus revere
E'en after death thine enemy?

ULYSSES.

I do:
Virtue is dearer to me than revenge.

AGAMEMNON.

Such men are most unstable in their ways,

ULYSSES.

Our dearest friend may one day be our foe.

AGAMEMNON.

Dost thou desire such friends?

ULYSSES.

I cannot love
Or praise th' unfeeling heart.

AGAMEMNON.

This day shall Greece
Mark us for cowards,

ULYSSES.

Greece will call us just:

AGAMEMNON.

Would'st thou persuade me then to grant him burial?

ULYSSES.

I wou'd, and for that purpose came I hither.

AGAMEMNON.

How ev'ry man consults his own advantage,
And acts but for himself!

ULYSSES.

And who is he
Whom I shou'd wish to serve before Ulysses?

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis thy own work, remember, and not mine.

ULYSSES.

The deed will win thee praise, and ev'ry tongue
Shall call thee good.

AGAMEMNON.

Thou know'st I'd not refuse
Ulysses more, much more than this; but Ajax
Or bury'd or unbury'd is the same,
And must be hateful still to Agamemnon;
But do as it beseems thee best.

CHORUS.

Ulysses,
The man who says thou art not wise and good
Is senseless and unjust.

ULYSSES.

I tell thee, Teucer,
Henceforth I am as much the friend of Ajax
As once I was his foe: e'en now I mean
To join with thee, a fellow-labourer
In all the pious offices of love,
Nor wou'd omit, what ev'ry man shou'd pay,
The honours due to such exalted virtue!

TEUCER.

O! best of men, thou hast my thanks and praise,
And well deserv'st them, for thou hast transcended
My utmost hopes: I little thought the worst
Of all his foes among the Grecian host
Wou'd thus alone defend, alone protect
The dead from insult, when these thund'ring leaders
United came, to cast his body forth
With infamy; but may the god who rules
O'er high Olympus, and the vengeful furies,
Daughters of Jove, the guilt-rewarding sisters,
With all-deciding justice soon repay
The haughty tyrants: for thy offer'd aid,
Son of Laertes, in the fun'ral rites,
Perhaps it might offend the honour'd shade
Of our dead friend, it cannot be accepted;
For all beside we thank thee: if thou will'st
To send assistance from the Grecian camp,
'Twill be receiv'd; the rest shall be my care.
Thou hast perform'd the duty of a friend,
And we acknowledge it.

ULYSSES.

I wou'd have lent
My willing aid, but since it must not be,
I shall submit; farewel. [*Exit* ULYSSES.

SCENE III.

AGAMEMNON, MENELAUS, TEUCER, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

Thus far is right;
The time already past doth chide our sloth:
My friends, be vigilant; let some prepare
The hollow foss, some o'er the sacred flame
Place the rich tripod for the fun'ral bath;
Forth from the camp a chosen band must bear
His glitt'ring arms, and trophies of the war.
Do thou, my child, if thou hast strength, uplift
[*to* EURYSACES.
Thy father's body; see, the veins, yet warm,
Spout forth with blood; haste, help, assist me, all
Who bear the name of friends, and pay with me
Your last sad duties to the noble Ajax;
For never was on earth a better man.

CHORUS.

Whate'er of good or ill weak mortals know,
Must from their best of guides, experience, flow;
Seek then no farther; for to man is giv'n
The present state, the future left to heav'n.

Whate'er of good or ill, &c. The sentiment in the original is, if I am not mistaken, exactly agreeable to my interpretation, though the Greek carries with it some degree of obscurity; it seems designed by Sophocles as a kind of moral to the drama; I have therefore taken the liberty more fully to express, and explain it in the translation. For a complete defence and illustration of this play, in all its parts, I refer my readers to Hedelin's Critique on Ajax, subjoined to his Pratique du Theatre, or, Whole Art of the Stage.

ELECTRA.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ELECTRA, Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

ORESTES, Brother of Electra.

PYLADES, Friend of Orestes.

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES.

CLYTEMNESTRA, Wife to Ægisthus.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, Sister of Electra.

ÆGISTHUS, King of Argos and Mycenæ.

CHORUS, composed of the principal Ladies of Mycénæ.

SCENE.—MYCENÆ, BEFORE THE PALACE OF ÆGISTHUS.

ELECTRA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES.

GOVERNOR.

O Son of great Atrides, he who led
Embattled Greece to Troy's devoted walls,
At length behold what thy desiring eyes
So long have sought; behold thy native soil,
Thy much-lov'd Argos, and the hallow'd grove
Of Io, frantic maid: on this side lies
The Lycian forum, on the left the fane
Of Juno far renown'd: behold! we come

The scene lies just before the gates of the palace of Ægisthus: on the back part of it is represented a view of the two cities of Argos and Mycenæ, the temple of Juno, and the grove of Io, which must altogether have made a noble and magnificent appearance, as the Greeks spared no expense in the decorations of their theatre. The place of action, the persons, with the whole view and subject of the piece, are pointed out to us, in the first scene, with that accuracy, plainness, and simplicity, for which Sophocles is so eminently distinguished.

The hallow'd grove of Io. Io, the daughter of Inachus, who was transformed into a heifer by Jupiter, to conceal her from the rage of Juno, who discovered and placed her under the guardianship of Argus. She afterwards sent a gad-fly to sting her into madness. The story is told in the first book of Ovid's Metamorph.

The Lycian forum. A place sacred to Apollo λυκιος or λυκοκτονος the wolf-slayer, so called from his killing wolves when under the disguise of a shepherd to Admetus.

The fane of Juno. Between Argos and Mycenæ, which are often mistaken by the tragic poets for the same city, was placed the magnificent

To rich Mycenæ, and the slaught'rous house
Of Pelops' hapless race, from whose sad walls
Long since I bore thee, at thy sister's hand
Gladly receiv'd, and with paternal care
To this blest day have foster'd up thy youth,
Till riper years shou'd give thee to return,
And pay with dire revenge thy father's murder.
Now, my Orestes, and thou dear companion
Of all our suff'rings, much-lov'd Pylades,
Let deepest counsel sway our just resolves;
For lo! resplendent Phœbus with his light
Calls up the cheerful birds to early song,
And gloomy night hath lost her starry train:
Come then, my friends, and ere th' awaken'd city
Pours forth her busy throngs, this instant here
Let us consult; believe me, 'tis no time
For dull delay; 'tis the decisive hour,
And this the very crisis of our fate.

ORESTES.

What proofs thou giv'st me of the noblest nature
And true benevolence, thou good old man!
Of servants sure the faithfulest and best
That ever bore the name: the gen'rous steed,
Tho' worn with years, thus keeps his wonted courage,
And warns his master of approaching danger;
Like him thou stirr'st me up to noble deeds,
And follow'st me undaunted: but attend
To what I have resolv'd, and if I err,
Let thy superior judgement set me right.
When to the Delphic oracle I flew,
Eager to know how on my father's foes

temple of Juno. Before the time of Agamemnon they had each a distinct sovereign: he first united and ruled over them both.

The slaught'rous house of Pelops. A family which furnished ample matter for the tragic poets. The stories, here alluded to, of Tantalus, Pelops, Thyestes, Agamemnon, &c. are too well known to need any illustration.

I best might satiate my revenge, the god
Enjoin'd me not by force or open arms
To rush upon them, but with guileful arts
And silent well-conducted fraud betray them.
Such was his will: thou therefore, soon as time
Shall lend thee opportunity, unknown
And unsuspected (as thy absence hence
For so long space and hoary age shall make thee)
Must steal upon them, learn their secret counsels,
As soon thou may'st, and quick inform us of them;
Say thou'rt of Phocis, from Phanoteus sent
By one who is their friend and firm ally;
Say, and confirm it with a solemn oath,
Orestes is no more, by a rude shock
Thrown from his chariot at the Pythian games;
Be this thy tale; mean time (for thus the god
His will divine express'd) my father's tomb
With due libations and devoted hair
Ourselves will crown; and thence returning bring
From the dark covert where thou know'st 'twas hid,
The brazen urn; there, we shall tell the tyrant,
Thrice welcome news! Orestes' ashes lie.
What shou'd deter me from the pious fraud?

From Phanoteus sent, &c. Phanoteus was a small midland town of Phocis, a city of Greece, famous for the Oracle of Delphos; according to Strabo it was formerly called Panope.

At the Pythian games, &c. The games here mentioned, and which are described in the second act, were not instituted till five hundred years after the death of Orestes; Sophocles therefore is found guilty by the critics of a flagrant anachronism in this place. Mr. Brumoy however endeavours to defend him, by observing, that though the latest æra of their first celebration is dated at the 48th Olympiad, Apollo might nevertheless, immediately after the destruction of the Pytho, have himself instituted something like the grand solemnity, which was many years afterwards heightened and improved by the public exhibition of these games under the influence of the civil power.

The pious fraud, &c. The Greeks, who were remarkably superstitious, entertained a notion, that to feign themselves dead, had something in it both wicked and dangerous; they were apprehensive that death would

Since my feign'd death but gains me real fame,
And I shall wake to better life: the deed,
Which brings success and honour, must be good.
Oft times the wisest and the best of men
From death like this have rose with added greatness;
E'en so thy friend to his deluded foes
Shall soon return unlook'd for, and before them
Shine like a star with more distinguish'd lustre.
O! my lov'd country, and its guardian gods,
Receive Orestes, and with happy omen
Propitious smile, and thou, paternal seat,
For lo! by heav'n's command I come to purge thee
Of vile usurpers, and avenge thy wrongs;
Drive me not from thee an abandon'd exile
With infamy, but grant me to possess
My father's throne, and fix his injur'd race.
Thus far 'tis well: my faithful minister,
Thou to thy office, we to ours with speed;
So time and opportunity require,
On whom the fate of mortals must depend.

ELECTRA *(from within.)*

O misery!

GOVERNOR.

Methought a mournful voice
Spake from within.

ORESTES.

Perhaps the poor Electra;
Shall we not stay and hearken to it?

GOVERNOR.

No:
First be Apollo's great behests obey'd

not be thus mocked, but would revenge the fraud by coming upon them in reality. Orestes endeavours to shake off these fears, and to vindicate himself by the example of others who had done the same, and passed unpunished.

First be Apollo's, &c. The meeting of Electra and Orestes in this place would apparently have spoiled the whole œconomy of the drama;

Before thy father's tomb; that pious deed
Perform'd, shall fire our souls with nobler warmth,
And crown our bold attempt with fair success. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

ELECTRA.

O! sacred light, and O! thou ambient air!
Oft have ye heard Electra's loud laments,
Her sighs, and groans, and witness'd to her woes,
Which ever as each hateful morn appear'd
I pour'd before you: what at eve retir'd
I felt of anguish my sad couch alone
Can tell, which water'd nightly with my tears
Receiv'd me sorrowing; that best can tell
What pangs I suffer'd for a hapless father,
Whom not the god of war with ruthless hand
Struck nobly fighting in a distant soil,
But my fell mother, and the curs'd Ægisthus,
The partner of her bed, remorseless slew:
Untimely didst thou fall, lamented shade,
And none but poor Electra mourns thy fate;
Nor shall she cease to mourn thee, while these eyes
View the fair heavens, or behold the sun!
Never, O! never! like the nightingale
Whose plaintive song bewails her ravish'd brood;

it is therefore artfully deferred by the poet, at the same time that the reason alleged by the old man gives us the most favourable idea of the piety of the antients. A brother has an opportunity of seeing and conversing with a sister whom he loved, and from whom he had been separated twenty years, but he foregoes it, in order previously to perform a religious duty. Christians may read and profit by the example.

Like the nightingale, &c. Philomela, the daughter of Pandion, and sister of Procne the wife of Tereus. The poet, both in this and the following scene, takes the nightingale for Procne, as it was Procne and not Philomela who served up her son Itys to Tereus in revenge for the injury done to her sister. Æschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes also suppose Procne to have been changed into a nightingale.

Here will I still lament my father's wrongs,
And teach the echo to repeat my moan.
O! ye infernal deities, and thou
Terrestrial Hermes, and thou, Nemesis,
Replete with curses, and ye vengeful furies,
Offspring of gods, the ministers of wrath
To vile adult'rers, who with pity view
The slaughter'd innocent, behold this deed!
O! come, assist, revenge my father's murder;
Quickly, O! quickly bring me my Orestes;
For lo I sink beneath oppressive woe,
And can no longer bear the weight alone.

SCENE III.

CHORUS, ELECTRA.

CHORUS.

O! wretched daughter of an impious mother!
Wilt thou for ever mourn, for ever thus
With unavailing tears, and endless sorrow
Lament the royal Agamemnon's fate,
By a vile woman's wicked arts betray'd?
Perish the hand (forgive the pious curse,
Ye heav'nly pow'rs) that gave the deadly blow!

ELECTRA.

My noble friends, and partners in affliction,
Who thus, to soothe my sorrows, kindly try
Each art which love and friendship can inspire;
Ye come to comfort me, I know ye do,
I know my tears are fruitless all and vain;
But, O! permit me to indulge my griefs,
For I must weep.

CHORUS.

Thy tears can ne'er recall him
From the dark mansions of the common grave,
No, nor thy pray'rs; they can but make thee wretched,

And sink thee deeper in calamity;
Why art thou then so fond of misery?

ELECTRA.

Devoid of sense and feeling is the heart
That can forget an injur'd parent's wrongs.
I love the airy messenger of Jove,
The mournful bird that weeps her Itys' fate,
And ev'ry night repeats the tender tale;
Thee too I rev'rence as a goddess, thee,
Unhappy Niobe! for still thou weep'st,
And from the marble tears eternal flow.

CHORUS.

But O! reflect, that not to thee alone
Misfortune comes, that comes to all: behold
Iphianassa, and Chrysothemis,
And him who hides his grief, illustrious youth,
The lov'd Orestes, these have suffer'd too.

ELECTRA.

Orestes! yes, Mycenæ shall receive
In happy hour her great avenger; Jove
With smiles auspicious shall conduct him to me;
For him alone I wait, for him, a wretch
Despis'd, of children and of nuptial rites
Hopeless I wander; he remembers not
What I have done for him, what suffer'd, still
With airy promises he mocks my hopes,
And yet he comes not to me.

Messenger of Jove. Procne, called the messenger of Jove, from her ushering in the spring. See the note on Philomela.

Unhappy Niobe! Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus, and queen of Thebes; feigned by the poets to be turned into a stone, after the death of her children. See Ovid's Met. Book VI.

Iphianassa and Chrysothemis. Homer (Il. Book IX.) mentions three daughters of Agamemnon, Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa. Euripides takes no notice of any but Iphigenia, (who was sacrificed) and Electra. Possibly the Laodice of Homer is the Electra of Sophocles. The poets took the liberty of changing circumstances of this nature, not essential to the subject, as they thought proper.

CHORUS.

But he will.
Despair not daughter; Jove is yet in heav'n,
The god who sees, and knows, and governs all:
Patient to him submit, nor let thy rage
Too far transport thee, nor oblivion drown
The just remembrance of thy matchless woes;
Time is a kind indulgent deity,
And he shall give thee succour, he shall send
The god of Acheron, from Chrysa's shores
To bring Orestes and avenge thy wrongs.

ELECTRA.

O! but the while how much of life is gone!
And I a hapless wretched orphan still,
Without a friend to guard, or to protect me;
Disgrac'd, dishonour'd, like a stranger clad
In base attire, and fed with homeliest fare.

CHORUS.

Sad news indeed the hapless messenger
To Argos brought, that spoke the wish'd return
Of thy lov'd father to his native soil;
Fatal the night when Agamemnon fell
Or by a mortal or immortal hand;
The work of fraud and lust, a horrid deed!
Whoe'er perform'd it.

From Chrysa's shores. Chrysa, or Chryssa, was a town of Phocis by the river side, of which Strophius, the father of Pylades, was king; this was the place where Orestes was privately educated, and accounts for the so much celebrated friendship of the two princes.

The work of fraud and lust. Ægisthus and Clytemnestra are said to have watched Agamemnon as he came out of the bath, when they threw over his head a shirt without any opening at the neck; entangled in this they murdered him: thus was the scheme laid by fraud and treachery, and executed by lust.

Whoe'er perform'd it. The Chorus seem fearful of attributing that crime to Clytemnestra and Ægisthus, which they knew them guilty of, and to doubt whether they were at liberty to imprecate the divine vengeance on them for it. Dacier attributes this to the author's own idea of government, as requiring the implicit submission of subjects

ELECTRA.

O! detested feast:
O! day, the bitt'rest sure that ever rose!
With him I perish'd then; but may the gods
Repay the murd'rers; never may they hear
The voice of joy, or taste of comfort more!

CHORUS.

Cease thy complaints, already hast thou suffer'd
For thy loud discontents, and threat'ned vengeance.
'Tis folly to contend with pow'r superior.

ELECTRA.

Folly indeed, and madness! but my griefs
Will force their way, and whilst Electra breathes
She must lament; for who will bring me comfort,
Or soothe my sorrows? let me, let me go,
And weep for ever.

CHORUS.

'Tis my love intreats;
Trust me, I feel a mother's fondness for thee,
And fain wou'd save thee from redoubled woes.

ELECTRA.

And would'st thou have me then neglect the dead!
Forget my father? can there be such guilt?
When I do so may infamy pursue me!
And if I wed, may all the joys of love
Be far remov'd! if vengeance doth not fall
On crimes like these, for ever farewell justice,
Shame, honour, truth, and piety, farewell!

to their king, whether he was their lawful sovereign or an usurper. Perhaps a better reason for this diffidence may be assigned from the natural modesty of the sex, and the impiety of cursing those who had at least done no injury to them.

I feel a mother's fondness, &c. The Chorus is composed of the principal ladies of Mycenæ; the air of authority with which they address Electra, their calling her daughter, with other circumstances, make it most probable that, as Dacier has remarked, they were not virgins, but matrons of rank and quality in the city.

CHORUS.

Pardon me, daughter; if my warmth offend,
Glad I submit; we'll follow, and obey thee.

ELECTRA.

I am myself to blame, and blush to think
How much unfit I seem to bear the weight
Impos'd upon me; but indeed 'tis great:
Forgive me, friends, a woman born as I am,
Must she not grieve to see each added minute
Fraught with new mis'ries? thus to be a slave
E'en in my father's house, and from those hands
Which shed his blood to ask the means of life!
Think what my soul must suffer to behold
The curs'd Ægisthus seated on the throne
Of Agamemnon, in the very robes
Which once were his; to see the tyrant pour
Libations forth e'en on the fatal spot,
Where the sad deed was done; but worst of all,
To see the murd'rer usurp his bed,
Embrace my mother, (by that honour'd name
If I may call a guilty wretch like her)
Who pleas'd returns his love, and, of her crimes
Unconscious, smiles, nor fears th' avenging furies;
But ever as the bloody day returns
Which gave the royal victim to her wiles,
Annual the dance and choral song proclaim
A solemn feast, nor impious sacrifice
Forgets she then to her protecting gods,
Shock'd at the cruel banquet I retire,
And in some corner hide my griefs, deny'd
E'en the sad comfort to indulge my sorrows;

Proclaim a solemn feast. Nothing could add more to to the horror of the crime than such a circumstance. Clytemnestra, not content with murdering her husband, institutes a solemn feast in commemoration of the happy event, and calls it, with cruel raillery, the supper of Agamemnon. Dinias, in his history of Argos, informs us it was on the 13th of the month Gamelion, which answers to the beginning of our January.

For Clytemnestra in opprobrious terms
Reviles me oft; " To thee alone, she cries,
" Is Agamemnon lost, detested maid!
" Think'st thou Electra only weeps his fate?
" Perdition on thee! may th' infernal gods
" Refuse thee succour, and protract thy pains!"
Thus rails she bitter, and if chance she hear
Orestes is approaching, stung with rage
Wild she exclaims, " Thou art th' accursed cause,
" This is thy deed, who stole Orestes from me,
" And hid him from my rage; but be assur'd
" Ere long my vengeance shall o'ertake thee for it!"
These threats her noble lord still urges on;
That vile adult'rer, that abandon'd coward,
Whose fearful soul call'd in a woman's aid
To execute his bloody purposes.
Mean-time Electra sighs for her Orestes,
Her wish'd avenger; his unkind delay
Destroys my hopes; alas! my gentle friends,
Who can bear this, and keep an equal mind?
To suffer ills like mine, and not to err
From wild distraction, wou'd be strange indeed.

CHORUS.

But say, Electra, is the tyrant near?
Or may we speak our thoughts unblam'd?

ELECTRA.

Thou may'st;
I had not else beyond the palace dar'd
To wander hither.

CHORUS.

I wou'd fain have ask'd thee ———

ELECTRA.

Ask what thou wilt, Ægisthus is far off.

CHORUS.

Touching thy brother then, inform me quick
If aught thou know'st that merits firm belief.

ELECTRA.

He promises, but comes not.

CHORUS.

Things of moment
Require deliberation and delay.

ELECTRA.

O! but did I delay to save Orestes?

CHORUS.

He boasts a noble nature, and will ne'er
Forget his friends: be confident.

ELECTRA.

I am,
Were I not so I had not liv'd till now.

CHORUS.

But soft; behold the fair Chrysothemis
Advance this way, and in her hand she bears
Sepulchral off'rings to the shades below.

SCENE IV.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Still, my Electra, pouring forth thy griefs?
Art thou not yet by sad experience taught
How little they avail? I too must feel
And cou'd resent, as, were thy sister's pow'r
But equal to her will, our foes should know.
Mean-time with lower'd sail to bear the storm
Befits us best, nor, helpless as we are,
With idle hopes to meditate revenge;
Yield then with me, and tho' impartial justice
Plead on thy side, remember, if we prize
Or life or liberty, we must obey.

Sepulchral offerings. The libations, or sepulchral offerings here mentioned, were generally honey, wine, milk, water, and barley-flour; these were designed to render the ghost kind and propitious, and were therefore called σπονδαὶ ἡδυσματοι or θελκτηριοι; these were poured upon the ground or grave-stone, and, together with a certain form of words, offered to the deceased.

ELECTRA.

It ill becomes great Agamemnon's daughter
Thus to forget her noble father's worth,
And take a base unworthy mother's part;
For well I see from whom thy counsels flow;
Nought from thyself thou say'st but all from her:
Either thy reason's lost, or if thou hast it,
Thou hast forgot thy friends who shou'd be dear
And precious to thee: of thy boasted hate
Against our foes, and what thou vaunt'st to do,
If thou had'st pow'r, I reck not; whilst with me
Thou wilt not join in great revenge, but still
Dissuad'st me from it; is't not cowardly
To leave me thus? tell me, I beg thee, tell me
What mighty gain awaits my tame submission,
Shou'd I suppress my griefs: I can but live,
That I do now, a wretched life indeed!
But 'tis enough for me, and I am happy
Whilst I can torture them, and to the dead
Pay grateful honours; (if to them such care
Aught grateful can bestow) thy hate, I fear me
Is but in word: thou dost befriend the murd'rers:
For me, not all the wealth they cou'd bestow,
Not all the gifts which they have pour'd on thee,
Shou'd bind me to 'em: take thy costly banquets,
And let thy days with ease and pleasure flow;
Give me but food, and I am satisfied.
I wish not for thy honours, nor would'st thou,
If thou wer't wise, receive 'em at their hands.
Thou might'st be daughter to the best of fathers,
And art thy mother's only; take that name,
And henceforth all shall mark thee as a wretch
Who hath betray'd her father and her friends.

CHORUS.

I do intreat you, let not anger come
Between you thus; you both have reason'd well,
And much of mutual benefit may flow,

If each to other lend a patient ear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Custom, my noble friends, hath made reproach
Familiar to me, and so well I know
Her haughty mind, I had been silent still
But that I saw the danger imminent,
And came to warn her of the fatal stroke,
Which soon must end her and her griefs together.

ELECTRA.

Tell me this mighty danger; if aught more
It threaten than Electra long hath borne,
I yield me to thy counsels.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Hear me then:
Know, thou art doom'd, unless thou dost refrain
Thy clam'rous griefs, far from the light of day,
And this thy native soil, within a cell
Dismal and dark to spend the poor remains
Of thy sad life, and there lament thy fate.

ELECTRA.

Is it decreed? must it in truth be so?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Soon as Ægisthus shall return, it must.

ELECTRA.

Quick let him come: I long to see him here.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Alas! what dreadful imprecations these!

ELECTRA.

Wou'd he were present, if for this he comes!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What! to destroy thee! is thy mind disturb'd?

ELECTRA.

That I might fly for ever from thy sight.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Wilt thou not think how to preserve thy life?

ELECTRA.

Mine is a blessed life indeed to think of.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

It might be blest, if thou woud'st have it so.

ELECTRA.

Teach me not basely to betray my friends.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I do not; all I ask thee is to yield
To pow'rs superior.

ELECTRA.

Fawn on them thyself;
Thou dost not know Electra.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Sure it better
Deserves the name of wisdom to avoid
Than hasten thy destruction.

ELECTRA.

No, to die
Were pleasure, cou'd I but avenge my father.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Our father, doubt it not, will pardon thee.

ELECTRA.

'Tis mean to think so.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Wilt thou not consent?

ELECTRA.

Never, O! never, be my soul so weak.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Then to my errand: fare thee well.

ELECTRA.

To whom
Chrysothemis, and whither dost thou bear
Those sacred off'rings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

To our father's tomb,
From Clytemnestra.

ELECTRA.

To the man she hated?
The man, my sister ——

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Whom she kill'd, I know
Thou wou'd have said.

ELECTRA.

Why, what shou'd move her to it?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

If I mistake not, horrors late impress'd
From a sad vision.

ELECTRA.

O! my country's gods,
Succour me now!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What hopes dost thou conceive
From this?

ELECTRA.

The dream: and I will tell thee all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I know but little of it.

ELECTRA.

Tell me that:
Oft'times to words, how few soe'er they be,
Is giv'n the pow'r to save or to destroy.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Once more to light return'd (so fame reports)
Before her our lov'd father did appear,
The royal sceptre wielded in his hand
Which now Ægisthus bears, whence seem'd to spring
A green and leafy branch, whose wide extent
O'er all Mycenæ spread its verdant shade:
This did I learn, and this alone, from one.

Once more to light, &c. In the Choephoræ of Æschylus, Clytemnestra dreams that she was brought to bed of a dragon, to whom she gives suck, and who draws out all her blood. Sophocles, who borrowed this incident from his predecessor, has altered and improved it; the circumstances here related are more interesting, and the interpretation more obvious; besides that, it is rendered instrumental to the plan of the drama, by sending Chrysothemis to her father's tomb, where she finds the offerings of Orestes, which prepares the discovery of his unexpected arrival.

Who listen'd long attentive while she told
Her vision to the sun; hence all her fears,
And hence my destin'd journey.

ELECTRA.

By the gods
Let me conjure thee, hear me; if thou dost not,
Too late shalt thou repent, when for thy guilt
Evil o'ertake thee; O! Chrysothemis!
Never, I beg thee, to our father's tomb
Bear thou those off'rings; 'twere a horrid deed
From such a woman; give 'em to the winds,
Let them be hid, deep bury'd in the sands,
And not the smallest grain escape to reach
That hallow'd place; let 'em remain for her,
Safe in the earth till she shall meet 'em there.
None but this shameless, this abandon'd woman,
Wou'd e'er with impious off'rings thus adorn
The tomb of him she murder'd: by the dead
Think'st thou such gifts can be with joy receiv'd?
Gifts from that hand, which from his mangled corse
Sever'd his lifeless limbs, and on the head
Of the poor victim wip'd her bloody sword:
Madness to think that off'rings and ablutions
Cou'd purge such crimes, or wash her stains away;

Told her vision to the sun. It was customary among the antients, when they had been terrified by bad dreams, to open their windows in the morning, and relate their dreams to the sun, who, they imagined, as he had power to dispel the darkness, could also turn aside all the evils which the preceding night had threatened them with; Apollo was therefore stiled ἀποτρόπαιος, or, the averter of evil, and had images erected to him under that title.

Severed his lifeless limbs. The word μελαχλαίνη in the original, and which is made use of by Æschylus also, is supposed by the commentators to allude to a superstitious custom of achroterising, or cutting off the external parts of the person slain, and fixing them under their arm-pits; a kind of charm, which the murderer imagined would prevent him from sending the furies to revenge his murder.

Wip'd her bloody sword. The murderer wiped the instrument of the murder in the hair of the deceased, and then washed it, persuaded that this would wipe away the guilt also.

Never, O! never: but of this no more:
Instant, my sister, thy devoted hair
With these dishevell'd locks, and this my zone,
Plain as it is and unadorn'd, shalt thou
Bear to our father; wretched off'rings these!
But, O! 'tis all Electra now can give.
Bear them, and suppliant on thy knees implore him
To smile propitious, and assist his children;
Pray for Orestes too, that soon with pow'r
He may return, and trample on our foes;
So shall a fairer tribute one day grace
His honour'd tomb than now we can bestow.
Trust me, my sister, we are still his care,
I know we are; from him the vision came,
The horrid dream that shook her guilty soul:
Now then, I beg thee, be a friend to me,
Be to thyself a friend, a friend to him,
Of all mankind the dearest, our dead father.

CHORUS.

Well doth the pious virgin speak, and thou
Must yield to her requests.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

And so I will.
Where reason dictates, strife shou'd never come;
But quick, dispatch, fulfil her just commands;
Yet, O! my friends, remember, our attempt
Is full of danger, and let nought escape
That may betray me to my cruel mother;
For, if it reach her ear, this daring act,
I fear me much, shall one day cost us dear.

[*Exit* CHRYSOTHEMIS.

SCENE V.

CHORUS, ELECTRA.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Or my prophetic mind is now no more
Attentive as of old to wisdom's lore,
Or justice comes, with speedy vengeance franght;
Behold! the goddess arm'd with pow'r appears,
It must be so, by Clytemnestra's fears,
And the dire dream that on her fancy wrought:
Thy father, not unmindful of his fate,
Shall hither come his wrongs to vindicate;
And, in his gore imbrued,
The fatal axe with him shall rise,
Shall ask another sacrifice,
And drink with him the cruel tyrant's blood.

ANTISTROPHE

Lo! with unnumber'd hands, and countless feet
The fury comes her destin'd prey to meet,
Deep in the covert hid she glides unseen,
Hangs o'er the trembling murd'rer's head,
Or steals to the adult'rous bed,
An awful witness of the guilty scene;
Doubtless the dream with all its terrors meant
For crimes like these some dreadful punishment,

Scene V. This is the first song or intermede of the Chorus, who, after hearing the dream related by Chrysothemis, draw from it fair omens of Electra's success, and vengeance on the murderers of Agamemnon: it is remarkable that Electra remains on the stage all the time; a plain proof among many others that (as it is observed in the dissertation) the division of these tragedies into acts is merely arbitrary, and of late invention, as it would be absurd for the principal character to appear thus between the acts.

If mortals aught from nightly visions know,
If truth from great Apollo's shrine
Appears in oracles divine,
Presaging bliss to come, or threat'ning future woe.

EPODE.

O! Pelops, to thy country and to thee,
The fatal course brought woe and misery;
For since the time when from his chariot thrown,
For thee the guilty wreath to gain,
The hapless Myrtilus was slain,
Nought has thy wretched race but grief and sorrow known.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

ÆGISTHUS absent, who alone cou'd curb
Thy haughty spirit, and licentious tongue;

The hapless Myrtilus. To understand this passage it is necessary to be acquainted with the following story:

Oenomaus had a beautiful daughter, named Hippodamia, whom he refused to give in marriage, because the oracle declared that a son-in-law would be fatal to him; he promised however, to bestow his daughter on any man who should conquer him in the chariot-race, on condition that all, who were vanquished by him, should be put to death: many bold adventurers accepted the terms, and perished in the attempt; the horses of Oenomaus were swift as the wind, and consequently invincible; these examples however did not deter Pelops, who entered the lists against Oenomaus, and bribed his charioteer Myrtilus with a promise of half his kingdom if he succeeded; Myrtilus listened to his offers, and purposely forgot to put the pins into the wheels of his master's chariot, which broke in pieces in the middle of the course. Pelops espoused Hippodamia, but afterwards, instead of performing his promise to Myrtilus, chose rather to get rid of this instrument of treachery, by throwing him into the sea. Mercury, who it seems was the father of Myrtilus, revenged the murder of his son, by entailing curses on Pelops and all

At large, it seems, thou rov'st, and unrestrain'd,
No def'rence paid to my authority,
But on thy mother ever pouring forth
Bitter invectives, while the list'ning crowd
Are taught to hold me proud, and fierce of soul,
A lawless tyrant sland'ring thee and thine:
I am no sland'rer, I abhor the name,
But oft revil'd, of force I must reply,
And send thy foul reproaches back upon thee.
Thou say'st I slew thy father; that alone
Is left to plead for all thy insolence:
I do confess the deed, and glory in it;
I slew thy father; yet not I alone,
I had the hand of justice to assist me,
And shou'd have had Electra's: well thou know'st,
That cruel father, for whom thus thy tears
Incessant flow, that father slew his child;
He, he alone of all the Grecian host
Gave up his daughter, horrid sacrifice!
To the offended gods: he never felt
A mother's pangs, and therefore thought not of them;
Or if he did, why slay the innocent?
For Greece, thou tell'st me: Greece cou'd never claim
A right to what was mine; or did she fall
For Menelaus? he had children too;
Why might not they have died? their parent's guilt,
Source of the war, more justly had deserv'd it;
Or think'st thou death with keener appetite

his posterity. It appears by this, that the Heathens believed that God punished the crimes of fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation.

He had children too. According to Homer (see Odyss. b. 4.) Menelaus had only one child, Hermione. Hesiod gives him two, Hermione and Nicostratus: the latter tradition was more agreeable to Sophocles; because, if Menelaus had but one child, the loss would have been greater to him than to Agamemnon, who had many; this we see, would destroy the force of Clytemnestra's argument, which is strengthened by the other supposition.

Cou'd feast on mine, and Helen's not afford
As sweet a banquet? why was all the love,
To me and to my child so justly due,
With lavish hand bestow'd on Menelaus?
Was he not then a base inhuman father?
He was: and so, cou'd Iphigenia speak,
Thy breathless sister, she too wou'd declare:
Know then, I grieve not; shame or penitence
I feel not for the deed; and if to thee
It seems so heinous, weigh each circumstance,
Remember what he did, and lay the blame
On him who well deserv'd the fate he suffer'd.

ELECTRA.

Thou hast no plea for bitterness like this;
Thou can'st not say that I provok'd thee to it,
I have been silent: had I leave to speak
I cou'd defend an injur'd father's cause,
And tell thee wherefore Iphigenia fell.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do permit thee; and if modest thus
Thou had'st address'd me always, thy free speech
Had ne'er offended.

ELECTRA.

Hast thou not confess'd
That thou did'st slay my father? whether justice
Approve or not, 'twas horrid to confess it:
But justice never cou'd persuade thee, no;
I'll tell thee who it was, it was Ægisthus,
The wretch with whom thou liv'st; go ask the goddess

Cou'd Iphigenia speak. Clytemnestra endeavours to palliate her guilt, by reproaching Agamemnon with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Euripides strengthens this plea by the addition of another, which the ladies will allow to have been still more forcible, *viz.* that Agamemnon kept another woman, and even brought her into the same house with his wife. The fact is thus alluded to by Ovid;

Dum fuit Atrides una contentus, & illa
Casta fuit; vitio est improba facta viri.

Th' immortal huntress, why the winds were stay'd
So long at Aulis; but thou must not ask
The chaste Diana; take it then from me;
My father once, as for the chase prepar'd,
Careless he wander'd thro' her secret grove,
Forth from it's covert rous'd a spotted hind,
Of fairest form, with tow'ring antlers grac'd,
Pursu'd and slew her; of the deity
Something with pride elate be utter'd then
Disdainful; quick resenting the affront,
Latona's daughter stay'd the Grecian fleet,
Nor wou'd forgive, till for her slaughter'd beast
Th' offending father sacrific'd his child.
Thus Iphigenia fell; and but for her,
Greece ne'er had seen or Ilion's lofty tow'rs,
Or her own native soil; the father strove
In vain to save, and not for Menelaus
He gave her up at last, but for his country.
Suppose a brother's fondness had prevail'd,
And she was giv'n for him, wou'd that excuse
Thy horrid deed? what law requir'd it of thee?
That law alone by which thyself must fall;
If blood for blood be due, thy doom is fix'd.
Plead not so poorly then, but tell me why
Thou liv'st adult'rous thus with a vile ruffian,
Thy base assistant? why are those, who sprung
From thy first nuptials, cast unkindly forth

Thou must not ask the chaste Diana. A murderer and adulteress, like Clytemnestra, must not dare to approach or speak to the goddess of chastity. Clytemnestra feels the reproach, but at the same time, to persuade Electra that she was not affected by it, a few lines after we find her invoking that goddess, "by chaste Diana, soon as Ægisthus comes, &c."

My father once, &c. There is certainly an impropriety (though not, as I remember, observed by any of the commentators) in relating this story to Clytemnestra, who, we suppose, could be no stranger to it. Sophocles, however, thought it might be necessary to acquaint the audience with this circumstance, and therefore took this method to inform them of it.

For his new race? was this thy piety,
Was this too to revenge thy daughter's death?
In pure revenge to wed her deadliest foe
Was noble, was it not? but I forget,
You are my mother, so it seems you say,
And I must hold my peace; but I deny it;
I say you are my mistress, not my mother;
A cruel mistress that afflicts my soul,
And makes this weary life a burthen to me.
Orestes too, the hapless fugitive,
Who once escap'd thy fatal hand, now drags
A loathsome being; him, thou say'st, I look'd for
To join in my revenge, and so I did;
I wou'd have been reveng'd, I tell thee so:
Say, I am base, malicious, impudent,
Abusive, what thou wilt; for if I am,
It speaks my birth, and I resemble thee.

CHORUS.

Resentment deep hath fir'd the virgin's breast;
Whether with truth and justice on her side
She speak, I know not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can they plead for her?
What care, what love, or tenderness is due
To an abandon'd child, who shameless thus
Reviles a parent? is there, after this,
A crime in nature she wou'd blush to act?

ELECTRA.

I am not base, nor shameless, as thou call'st me,
For know, even now I blush for what is past,
Indecent warmth, and words that ill became
My tender years, and virgin modesty;
But 'twas thy guilt, thy malice urg'd me to it:
From bad examples, bad alone we learn,
I only err'd because I follow'd thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Impudent wretch! and am I then the cause

Of all thy clam'rous insolence;

ELECTRA.

Thou art:
Foul is thy speech, because thy deed was foul;
For words from actions flow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By chaste Diana,
Soon as Ægisthus comes, thy boldness meets
Its just reward.

ELECTRA.

Is this thy promis'd leave,
So lately granted, freely to unfold
What now incens'd thou dost refuse to hear?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Have I not heard thee, and in base return
With luckless omen dost thou now retard
My pious sacrifice?

ELECTRA.

O! far from me
Be guilt like that; perform it, I beseech thee;
In holy silence shall these lips be clos'd,
And not a word escape to thwart thy purpose.

CLYTEMNESTRA *(speaking to one of her Attendants.)*

Hither do thou the sacred off'rings bring
Of various fruits compos'd, that to the god
Whose altars we adorn, my fervent pray'r
May rise accepted, and dispel my fears.
Hear then, Apollo, great protector, hear
My secret vows, for with no friendly ear [*softly.*

With luckless omen, &c. The antients were of opinion, that if, during the time of sacrifice, they heard any thing melancholy, it was an ill omen; in the beginning of those therefore that were public, silence was enjoined to all present; hence the phrase of favete linguis.

Hear my secret vows. Brumoy observes on this passage, that Clytemnestra here retires towards a corner of the scene, near the altar, where she makes her prayer, and offers the sacrifice, whilst Electra remains upon the stage at a little distance from her; we must suppose her therefore, speaking part of this speech aloud, and part softly, so as not to

My voice is heard; her malice wou'd betray,
Shou'd I unveil my heart, each word I utter'd,
And scatter idle rumours thro' the crowd.
Thus then accept my pray'rs, Lycean Phœbus! [*aloud.*
If in the doubtful visions of the night
Which broke my slumbers, aught presaging good
Thou see'st, propitious, O! confirm it all;
But if of dire portent, and fraught with ill
To me and mine they came, avert the omen,
And send the evil back upon my foes!
O! if there are, whose fraudful arts conspire
To cast me forth from all my present bliss,
Let 'em not prosper, but protect me still!
Grant me to live and reign in quiet here,
To spend each happy hour with those I love;
With those my children who have ne'er offended
By malice, pride, and bitterness of soul;
Grant this, indulgent Phœbus! what remains
Unask'd, thou see'st; for nought escapes the eye
Of gods, such knowledge have the sons of Jove.

SCENE II.

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

GOVERNOR.

Is this the royal palace of Ægisthus?

CHORUS.

Stranger, it is.

be overheard by Electra: she implores Apollo to mark rather the purport, than the words of her prayer; this she utters in a low voice, till she comes to Lycean Phœbus, &c. which she speaks aloud.

With those my children, &c. Iphianassa and Chrysothemis, who had not affronted her, in opposition to Electra, who had.

What remains unask'd, &c. Most probably the death of Orestes and Electra, which she did not dare to mention in the presence of her daughter. Clytemnestra's character is finely drawn; her very prayers we see are wicked, and agreeable to her actions.

GOVERNOR.

And this, for such her form
And look majestic speak her, is his queen;
Is it not so?

CHORUS.

It is.

GOVERNOR.

Great sov'reign, hail!
With joyful news I come, and from a friend,
To thee and to Ægisthus.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Stranger, welcome;
Say, first, from whom thy message?

GOVERNOR,

From Phanoteus;
A Phocian sends thee things of utmost moment.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Of moment say'st thou? what? impart them quick.
Of friendly import, if from thence they come,
I know they must be.

GOVERNOR.

Briefly then, 'tis this:
Orestes is no more.

ELECTRA.

Undone Electra!
Now am I lost indeed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What say'st thou? speak,
Regard not her; go on.

GOVERNOR.

I say again,
Orestes is no more.

ELECTRA.

Then what am I?
I too am nothing.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to* ELECTRA.)

Get thee hence, away!

Disturb us not: most welcome messenger!

[*to the* GOVERNOR.

Go on, I beg thee, let me hear it all;
Say how he died; tell evr'y circumstance.

GOVERNOR.

For that I came, and I will tell thee all.
Know then, Orestes at the Pythian games,
Eager for glory met assembled Greece;
Soon as the herald's far-resounding voice
Proclaim'd the course, the graceful youth appear'd,
And was by all admir'd: successful soon
He reach'd the goal, and bore his prize away.
Ne'er did these eyes behold such feats perform'd
By mortal strength; in ev'ry course superior
He rose victorious: theme of ev'ry tongue
Was the brave Argive, great Atrides' son,
Who led the Grecian host; but O! in vain
Doth human valour strive, when pow'r divine
Pursues vindictive! the succeeding morn
Uprose the sun, and with him all the train
Of youthful rivals in the chariot race;
One from Achaia, one from Sparta came,
Of Afric's sons advanc'd a noble pair,

Orestes at the Pythian games, &c. Our modern critics will perhaps be of opinion, that this description of the Pythian games, so much admired by the favourers of antiquity, is too long, and rather interrupts than carries on the business of the drama; it will be in vain therefore to inform them, that this circumstantial detail was necessary to give the story an air of veracity in the eyes of the person to whom it is related, at the same time that the author had, by this means, an opportunity of shewing his poetical and descriptive talents in the narration.

In ev'ry course superior, &c. The πενταθλον or quintertium, here alluded to, consisted of five exercises, viz. leaping, running, throwing, darting, and wrestling; Orestes conquered in every one of them; this was the business of the first day of the games, the second was employed in the chariot-race, which is here minutely and accurately described.

One from Achaia, &c. In the Greek, it is the first from Achaia, the second from Sparta, and so on to the tenth, which would have made an awkward appearance in English; I have therefore taken the liberty to vary the method of enumerating them in the translation.

And join'd the throng; with these Orestes drove
His swift Thessalian steeds; Ætolia next
For yellow coursers fam'd; and next Magnesia;
And Athens, built by hands divine, sent forth
Her skilful charioteer; an Ænian next
Drove his white Horses thro' the field; and last
A brave Bæotian clos'd the warrior train.
And now in order rang'd, as each by lot
Determin'd stood, forth at the trumpet's sound
They rush'd together, shook their glitt'ring reins,
And lash'd their foaming coursers o'er the plain.
Loud was the din of ratt'ling cars involv'd
In dusty clouds; close on each other prest
The rival youths, together stopt, and turn'd
Together all: the hapless Ænian first,
His fiery steeds impatient of subjection,
Entangled on the Lybian chariot hung;
Confusion soon and terror thro' the crowd
Disastrous spread; the jarring axles rung;
Wheel within wheel now crack'd, till Chrysa's field
Was with the scatter'd ruins quite o'erspread.
Th' Athenian cautious view'd the distant danger,
Drew in the rein, and turn'd his car aside,
Then past them all. Orestes, who secure
Of conquest lagg'd behind, with eager pace
Now urg'd his rapid course, and swift pursu'd.
Sharp was the contest; now th' Athenian first,
And now Orestes o'er his coursers hung,
Now side by side they ran; when to the last
And fatal goal they came, Atrides' son,
As chance with slacken'd rein he turn'd the car,
Full on the pillar struck, tore from the wheel

Athens, built by hands divine. Sophocles, who was an Athenian, takes every opportunity of doing honour to his countrymen; Athens, we see, is distinguished by him in the list as built by hands divine; and the Athenian charioteer, selected from the rival chiefs, to contend with his hero Orestes, who had easily overcome all the rest.

Its brittle spokes, and from his seat down drop'd
Precipitate; entangled in the reins
His fiery coursers dragg'd him o'er the field,
Whilst shrieking crowds with pity view'd the youth,
Whose gallant deeds deserv'd a better fate.
Scarce cou'd they stop the rapid car, or loose
His mangled corse, so drench'd in blood, so chang'd,
That scarce a friend cou'd say it was Orestes.
Straight on the pile they burnt his sad remains,
And in an urn enclos'd, a chosen few
From Phocis sent have brought his ashes home,
To reap due honours in his native land.
Thus have I told thee all, a dreadful tale!
But O! how far more dreadful to behold it,
And be like me a witness of the scene!

CHORUS.

Ah me! the royal race, the antient house
Of my lov'd master is no more!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Great Jove!
Th' event was happy, but 'tis mix'd with woe.
For, O! 'ts bitter to reflect, that life
And safety must be purchas'd by misfortunes.

GOVERNOR.

Why grieve you, madam?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis a bitter task
To bring forth children; tho' a mother's wrong'd,
A mother cannot hate the babe she bore.

GOVERNOR.

Then with ungrateful news in vain I came;

'*Tis mix'd with woe.* Dacier highly commends the art of the poet in Clytemnestra's expression of uneasiness at the death of Orestes; as to have received the news without any marks of tenderness or compassion would have been shocking to nature and humanity. But perhaps a better reason for this dissembled sorrow may be drawn from her willingness to preserve some decency and appearance of virtue in the eyes of the messenger.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O no; most welcome is the man who brings
Such joyful tidings, that a thankless child
Is gone, who left a tender mother's arms,
To live a voluntary exile from me;
Ne'er to these eyes return'd, but absent rag'd,
And threat'ned vengeance for his murder'd father;
Day had no rest for me, nor did the night
Bring needful slumbers, thoughts of instant death
Appall'd me ever; but my fears are gone;
He cannot hurt me now, nor worse than him,
This vile domestic plague, who haunts me still
To suck my vital blood; but henceforth safe,
Spite of her threats, shall Clytemnestra live.

ELECTRA.

Now, my Orestes, I indeed must mourn
Thy cruel fate, embitter'd by reproach,
And from a mother's tongue; this is not well.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

With him it is, and wou'd it were with thee!

ELECTRA.

Attend, O! Nemesis! and hear the dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She heard that voice which best deserv'd her ear,
And her decrees are just.

ELECTRA.

Go on, proud woman;
Insult us now, whilst fortune smiles upon thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Dost thou then hope that we shall fall hereafter?

ELECTRA.

No! we are fall'n ourselves, and cannot hurt thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thrice worthy is that messenger of joy
Whose gladsome news shall stop thy clam'rous tongue.

GOVERNOR.

My task perform'd, permit me to retire.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No, stranger, that were an affront to thee,
And to our friend who sent thee here. Go in,
And leave that noisy wretch to bellow forth
Her sorrows, and bewail her lost Orestes. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

Mark'd ye, my friends, did ye observe her tears?
Did she lament him? did the mother weep
For her lost child? O no; she smil'd and left me;
Wretched Electra! O my dear Orestes!
Thou hast undone me; thou wert all my hope:
I thought thou wou'd'st have liv'd to aid my vengeance
For our lov'd father's death; depriv'd of both
Whither shall I betake me! left at last
A slave to those whom most on earth I hate,
The cruel murd'rers; must it then be so?
Never, O never! thus bereft of all,
Here will I lay me down, and on this spot
End my sad days; if it offend the tyrants,
Let 'em destroy me; 'twill be kindly done;
Life is a pain; I wou'd not wish to keep it.

CHORUS.

Where is thy thunder, Jove? or, where thy pow'r,

Here will I lay me down. Electra, shocked at the behaviour of Clytemnestra, and apprehensive of still worse treatment than she had ever yet received, is resolved never to re-enter the palace of Ægisthus; but lays herself down in anguish on the ground to lament her misfortunes. There is something not unlike this in Shakespear's King John, where Constance throws herself on the earth. See King John, Act 3, Scene 1.

Where is thy thunder, Jove, &c. I see no reason for making the alteration here proposed by Dacier, and putting these words into the mouth of Electra; surely the reflection comes naturally from the Chorus, who had been witnesses of Clytemnestra's behaviour on the news of

O Phœbus! if thou dost behold this deed
And not avenge it?

ELECTRA.

Oh!

CHORUS.

Why mourn'st thou thus?

ELECTRA.

Alas!

CHORUS.

O! do not groan thus.

ELECTRA.

Thou destroy'st me.

CHORUS.

How have I hurt thee?

ELECTRA.

Why thus vainly try
To give me comfort, when I know he's dead?
You but insult my woes.

CHORUS.

Yet weep not thus.
Think on the golden bracelet that betray'd

Orestes' death. It may not be improper here to observe, that this is generally called the second intermede, or song of the Chorus; who, in conjunction with Electra, remaining on the stage, as at the end of the first act, sing a kind of dirge, lamenting the miseries of their friend, and endeavouring to comfort her under them; this is all in Strophe and Antistrophe, and most probably was set to music: it should therefore, according to my plan, have been put into rhyme, to distinguish it from the other parts of the drama; but as it consists of question and answer, it would have made but a strange and uncouth appearance in that garb. I have therefore preserved the blank verse, which my readers will, I believe, think with me, was much more suitable to it.

The golden bracelet that betray'd Amphiaraus. Amphiaraus was a famous soothsayer. During the time of the Theban war, he was solicited by Adrastus to assist Polynices, his son-in-law. Amphiaraus, foreseeing by his art, that if he went he should be slain, hid himself, but was discovered by his wife Eriphyle, whom Polynices had bribed with a golden bracelet. Amphiaraus, being thus obliged to appear at the siege of Thebes, perished there. Alcmæon his son revenged his father's death, and slew his mother Eriphyle.

Amphiaraus, who now——

ELECTRA.

O! me!

CHORUS.

——In bliss
Immortal reigns among the shades below.

ELECTRA.

Alas!

CHORUS.

No more; a woman was the cause,
Th' accursed cause.

ELECTRA.

She suffer'd, did she not?

CHORUS.

She did; she perish'd.

ELECTRA.

Yes; I know it well;
He found a kind avenger of his wrongs,
But I have none, for he is ravish'd from me.

CHORUS.

Thou art indeed unhappy.

ELECTRA.

'Tis too true.
I am most wretched, it beats hard upon me;
My sorrows never cease.

CHORUS.

We see thy woes.

ELECTRA

Therefore no more attempt to bring me comfort;
There is no hope.

CHORUS.

What say'st thou?

ELECTRA.

There is none,
None left for me; my noble brother slain.

CHORUS.

Death is the lot of human race.

ELECTRA.

But, oh!
Not death like his; entangled in the reins,
His mangled body dragg'd along the field.

CHORUS.

A strange unthought of chance.

ELECTRA.

And then to fall
A wretched stranger in a foreign land.

CHORUS.

O! horrible!

ELECTRA.

No sister there to close
His dying eyes, to grace him with a tomb,
Or pay the last sad tributary tear.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

FORGIVE me, sister, if my hasty steps
Press unexpected on thee; but I come
With joyful tidings, to relieve thy toils,
And make thee happy.

My hasty steps, &c. Camerarius, in a note on this passage, very gravely remarks, that a lady should never run, "quoniam in mulieribus cunctabunda omnia magis probantur," "because it is more becoming in women to do every thing deliberatively." Dacier likewise, with the refinement of a true French critic, observes, that it would be highly indecent in a virgin and a princess to walk fast: Sophocles, says he, ne manque pas a une seule bien-séance. Of such sagacious animadversions as these, do principally consist the illustrations of both the antient and modern commentators on Sophocles, scaree one of which (Brumoy excepted) seems to have read him with any taste or judgement.

ELECTRA.

What can'st thou have found
To soften ills that will admit no cure?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Orestes is arriv'd; as sure as here
I stand before thee, the dear youth is come.

ELECTRA.

Can'st thou then make a mock'ry of my woes;
Or dost thou rave?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

No, by our father's gods,
I do not mean to scoff: but he is come.

ELECTRA.

Alas! who told thee so? What tongue deceiv'd
Thy credulous ear?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Know, from myself alone
I learn'd the truth, and confirmations strong
Oblige me to believe it.

ELECTRA.

What firm proof
Can'st thou produce? what hast thou seen or known
To raise such flatt'ring hopes?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

O! by the gods
I beg thee but to hear me, then approve
Or blame, impartial.

ELECTRA.

If to tell thy tale
Can give thee pleasure, say it; I attend.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Know then, that soon as to our father's tomb
Eager I came, my wond'ring eyes beheld
Down from its side a milky fountain flow,
As lately pour'd by some benignant hand;
With various flow'rs the sacred spot adorn'd
Encreas'd my doubts: on ev'ry side I look'd

And listen'd long impatient for the tread
Of human footsteps there; but all was peace,
Fearless approaching then the hallow'd spot,
I saw it spread with fresh devoted hair;
Instant my soul recall'd its dearest hope,
Nor doubted whence the pious off'rings came;
I snatch'd them up and silent gaz'd, while joy
Sprang in my heart, and fill'd my eyes with tears
They were, they must be his; ourselves alone
Excepted, who cou'd bring them? 'twas not I,
And 'tis not giv'n to thee to leave these walls
E'en for the gods; our mother scarce wou'd do
So good an office; or e'en grant she might,
We must have known it soon; be confident,
It was Orestes then; rejoice, Electra,
Sister, rejoice; the same destructive pow'r
Doth not for ever rule; behold at last
A milder god, and happier days appear.

ELECTRA.

Madness, and folly! how I pity thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Have I not brought most joyful tidings to thee?

ELECTRA.

Alas! thou know'st not where nor what thou art.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Not know it? not believe what I have seen?

ELECTRA.

I tell thee, wretched as thou art, he's dead;

Our mother scarce, &c. This assertion may probably appear strange from the mouth of Chrysothemis, who had herself so lately been sent by Clytemnestra with offerings to the tomb of Agamemnon; why therefore might not she have made these libations also? There is no way of reconciling this seeming inconsistency, but by supposing that the libations here mentioned were of a different nature from the former; the first were an expiatory offering to turn aside the vengeance of the deceased; the last, of that kind which was generally made use of to signify the peculiar love and affection of those who made them.

He's dead. The hopes and joy of Chrysothemis are finely contrasted by the grief and despair of Electra. One brings the news of his

He and thy hop'd-for bliss are gone together.
Thou must not think of it.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

A wretch indeed
I am, if this be so; but O! from whom,
Where didst thou learn the fatal news?

ELECTRA.

From one,
Who was a witness of his death.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Where is he?
Amazement chills my soul.

ELECTRA.

He is within;
And no unwelcome guest to Clytemnestra.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Alas! who then cou'd bring those pious gifts?

ELECTRA.

Some friend to lost Orestes plac'd them there.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I flew with joy to tell thee better news,
And little thought to hear so sad a tale.
The griefs I came to cure are present still,
And a new weight of woes is come upon us.

ELECTRA.

But know, my sister, all may yet be well,
If thou wilt hear me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Can I raise the dead?

ELECTRA.

I am not mad that I shou'd ask it of thee.

arrival, the other of his death; thus the spectator, who is already acquainted with the truth, is made to sympathize with the unhappy sisters, and grows impatient for the discovery. Every subordinate circumstance, we see, by the artful conduct of the poet, is introduced to prepare the principal event, and heighten the terror and surprise of the catastrophe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What would'st thou have me do?

ELECTRA.

I'd have thee act
As I shall dictate to thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

If aught good
It may produce, I do consent.

ELECTRA.

Remember,
That if we hope to prosper, we must bear;
Success in all that's human must depend
On patience and on toil.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I know it well,
And stand resolv'd to bear my part in all.

ELECTRA.

Hear then the solemn purport of my soul,
Thou know'st too well how friendless and forlorn
We both are left, by death bereav'd of all
Who cou'd support us; whilst Orestes liv'd,
I cherish'd flatt'ring thoughts of sweet revenge;
But he is gone, and thou art now my hope.
Yes, thou must join (for I will tell thee all)
With thy Electra to destroy Ægisthus,
To kill the murd'rer; why shou'd we delay?
Is aught of comfort left? thou can'st but weep
Thy ravish'd fortunes torn unjustly from thee;
Thou canst but mourn thy loss of nuptial rites,
And each domestic bliss; for O! my sister,
The tyrant cannot be so weak of soul
As e'er to suffer our detested race
To send new branches forth for his destruction:
Assist me then; so shalt thou best deserve
A father's praises and a brother's love;
So shalt thou still, as thou wert born, be free,
And gain a partner worthy of thy bed.

Dost thou not hear th' applauding voice of fame,
And ev'ry tongue conspire to praise the deed?
Will they not mark us as we pass along,
And cry aloud, " behold the noble pair!
" The pious sisters who preserv'd their race,
" Whose daring souls, unaw'd by danger, sought
" The tyrant's life, regardless of their own.
" What love to these, what reverence is due!
" These shall th' assembled nation throng to praise,
" And ev'ry feast with public honours crown,
" The fit reward of more than female virtue?
Thus will they talk, my sister, whilst we live,
And after death our names shall be immortal.
Aid then a brother's, aid a sister's cause,
Think on thy father's wrongs, preserve Electra,
Preserve thyself; and, O! remember well,
That, to the noble mind, a life dishonour'd
Is infamy and shame.

CHORUS.

Be prudence now
The guide of both,

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Her mind was sure disturb'd,
My friends, or she wou'd ne'er have talk'd so wildly,
Tell me, I beg thee tell me, my Electra,
How could'st thou think so rash an enterprize
Cou'd e'er succeed, or how request my aid?
Hast thou consider'd what thou art? a woman,
Weak and defenceless, to thy foes unequal;
Fortune thou see'st each hour flows in upon them,
Nor deigns to look on us: what hand shall deal
The fatal blow and pass unpunish'd for it?
Take heed, my sister, lest, thy counsel heard,
A heavier fate than what we now lament
Fall on us both; what will our boasted fame
Avail us then? It is not death alone
We have to fear; to die is not the worst

Of human ills, it is to wish for death
And be refus'd the boon; consider well,
Ere we destroy ourselves and all our race.
Be patient, dear Electra; for thy words,
As they had ne'er been utter'd, here they rest:
Learn to be wise at last, and when thou know'st
Resistance vain, submit to pow'rs superior.

CHORUS.

Submit, convinc'd that prudence is the first
Of human blessings.

ELECTRA.

'Tis as I expected;
I knew full well thou would'st reject my counsel,
But I can act alone; nor shall this arm
Shrink at the blow, or leave it's work unfinish'd.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Wou'd thou hadst shewn this so much vaunted prowess
When our lov'd father died!

ELECTRA.

I was the same
By nature then, but of a weaker mind.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Be sure thy courage fail thee not hereafter.

ELECTRA.

Thy aid will ne'er increase it.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

'Twill be wanted;
For those who act thus rashly must expect
The fate they merit.

ELECTRA.

I admire thy prudence,
But I detest thy cowardice.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I hear thee
With patience; for the time must one day come
When thou shalt praise me.

ELECTRA.

Never.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Be that left
For time to judge; enough remains.

ELECTRA.

Away;
There's no dependence on thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

But there is,
Had'st thou a mind dispos'd for its acceptance.

ELECTRA.

Go, tell thy mother all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I am not yet
So much thy enemy.

ELECTRA.

And yet wou'd lead me
To Infamy.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

To safety and to wisdom.

ELECTRA.

Must I then judge as thy superior reason
May dictate to me?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

When thy better mind
Shall come, I'll not refuse to follow thee.

ELECTRA.

Pity who talks so well, shou'd act so poorly!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

That censure falls on thee.

ELECTRA.

What I have said
Is truth.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Truth, sister, may be dangerous.

ELECTRA.

Rather than thus submit I will not live,

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Hereafter thou wilt praise me.

ELECTRA.

I shall act
As seems most fit, nor wait for thy direction.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Art thou resolv'd then? wilt thou not repent
And take my counsel?

ELECTRA.

Counsel, such as thine,
Is of all ills the worst.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Because, Electra,
Thou dost not seem to understand it.

ELECTRA.

Know then,
That long ere this I had determin'd all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Then fare thee well; thou canst not bear my words,
Nor I thy actions.

ELECTRA.

Go thy ways; henceforth
I will not commune with thee; nor thy pray'rs,
No, nor thy tears should ever bend me to it;
Such idle commerce were the height of folly.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

If thou dost think this wisdom, think so still;
But when destruction comes, thou wilt approve
My better counsel, and be wise too late. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Man's ungrateful wretched race,
Shall the birds of heav'n disgrace,
Whose ever-watchful, ever-pious young,
Protect the feeble parent whence they sprung?
But if the blast of angry Jove
Hath pow'r to strike, or justice reigns above,
Not long unpunish'd shall such crimes remain;
When thou, O Fame! the messenger of woe,
Shalt bear these tidings to the realms below,
Tidings to Grecia's chiefs of sorrow and of pain.

ANTISTROPHE.

Bid the sad Atridæ mourn
Their house by cruel faction torn;
Tell 'em, no longer by affection join'd,
The tender sisters bear a friendly mind;
The poor Electra now alone,
Making her fruitless solitary moan,
Like Philomela, weeps her father's fate;
Fearless of death and every human ill,
Resolv'd her steady vengeance to fulfill;
Was ever child so good, or piety so great!

STROPHE II.

Still are the virtuous and the good
By adverse fortune unsubdu'd,

Man's ungrateful, &c. This, according to the received division into five acts, is the third song or intermede of the chorus, and closes the third act, which we may observe is thus made to consist of only a single scene; an absurdity which need not be pointed out to the judicious reader. The chorus, in this song, struck by the piety and resolution of Electra, lament her condition, and blame the coldness of Chrysothemis, who had refused to join her in revenging the death of their father.

Nor e'er will stoop to infamy and shame;
Thus Electra dauntless 'rose
The war to wage with virtue's foes,
To gain the meed of never-ending fame,

ANTISTROPHE II.

Far, far above thine enemies,
In pow'r and splendor may'st thou rise,
And future bliss compensate present woe!
For thou hast shewn thy pious love,
By all that's dear to heav'n above,
Or secred held by mortals here below. [*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I

ORESTES, PYLADES, (WITH ATTENDANTS) ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORESTES.

SAY, virgins, if by right instruction led
This way, I tend to——

CHORUS.

Whither wou'dst thou go?

ORESTES.

The palace of Ægisthus.

CHORUS.

Stranger, well
Wert thou directed; thou art there already.

ORESTES.

Who then amongst your train shall kindly speak
A friend's approach, who comes with joyful news
Of highest import?

CHORUS, *(pointing to* ELECTRA.*)*

Be that office her's,
Whom bound by nature's ties it best befits.

ORESTES.

Go then, and say from Phocis are arriv'd

Who beg admittance to the king.

ELECTRA.

Alas!

And com'st thou then to prove the dreadful tale
Already told?

ORESTES.

What you have heard I know not,
But of Orestes came I here to speak
By Strophius's command.

ELECTRA.

What is it, say;
O how I dread thy message!

ORESTES, *(shewing the Urn.)*

Here behold
His poor remains ——

ELECTRA.

O! lost, undone Electra!
'Tis then too plain, and mis'ry is complete.

ORESTES.

If for Orestes thus thy sorrows flow,
Know that within this urn his ashes lie.

ELECTRA.

Do they indeed? then let me, by the gods
I do intreat thee, let me snatch them from thee,
Let me embrace them, let me weep my fate,
And mourn our hapless race,

ORESTES.

Give her the urn,
Whoe'er she be; for not with hostile mind

What you have heard I know not. To prevent any suspicion of fraud or connivance, Orestes pretends to be an utter stranger to the message brought by the governor. The news coming thus by different hands, and at different times, confirms the report more strongly, and heightens the surprise at the discovery.

Whoe'er she be. Orestes must already imagine; that the person he talked to was one of his sisters; but as he had been so long absent could not be sure that it was Electra; the Chorus soon after puts him out of doubt by mentioning her name.

She craves the boon; perhaps some friend, perhaps
By blood united.

ELECTRA, *(taking the Urn.)*

O! ye dear remains
Of my Orestes, the most lov'd of men!
How do I see thee now! how much unlike
What my fond hopes presag'd, when last we parted!
I sent thee forth with all the bloom of youth
Fresh on thy cheek, and now, O! dismal change!
I bear thee in these hands an empty shade.
Wou'd I had died e'er I had sent thee hence,
E'er I had sav'd thee from the tyrant's hand!
Wou'd thou had'st died thyself that dreadful day,
And join'd thy murder'd father in the tomb,
Rather than thus a wretched exile fall'n,
Far from thy sister, in a foreign land!
I was not there with pious hands to wash
Thy breathless corpse, or from the greedy flame
To gather up thy ashes; what have all
My pleasing toils, my fruitless cares avail'd,
E'en from thy infant years, that as a mother
I watch'd thee still, and as a mother lov'd?
I wou'd not trust thee to a servant's hand,
But was myself the guardian of thy youth,
Thy dear companion; all is gone with thee;
Alas! thy death, like the devouring storm
Hath borne down all; my father is no more,
And thou art gone, and I am going too;

To wash thy breathless corpse. The custom of washing the body of the deceased is very ancient; this office was always performed by the nearest relations: Socrates, as we are informed by Plato, washed himself before his execution, probably to prevent its being done by strangers; Alcestis, likewise, in Euripides, after she had determined to die for her husband, washes herself. The Romans adopted this custom from the Greeks; and we find the mother of Euryalus, making the same complaint as Electra,

Nec te tua funera mater
Produxi pressive oculos aut vulnera lavi.

VIRG. Æn. l. 9.

Our foes rejoice; our mother, mad with joy,
Smiles at our mis'ries; that unnat'ral mother,
She whom thou oft hast promis'd to destroy;
But cruel fate hath blasted all my hopes
And for my dear Orestes left me nought
But this poor shadow: O! th' accursed place,
Where I had sent thee! O! my hapless brother,
Thou hast destroy'd Electra; take me then,
O! take me to thee! let this urn enclose
My ashes too, and dust to dust be join'd,
That we may dwell together once again;
In life united by one hapless fate,
I wou'd not wish in death to be divided;
The dead are free from sorrows.

CHORUS.

Fair Electra!
Do not indulge thy griefs; but, O! remember,
Sprung from a mortal like thyself, Orestes
Was mortal too, that we are mortal all.

ORESTES, *(aside.)*

What shall I say? I can refrain no longer.

ELECTRA.

Why this emotion.

ORESTES, *(looking at* ELECTRA.*)*

Can it be Electra?
That lovely form?

ELECTRA.

It is indeed that wretch.

ORESTES.

O! dreadful!

ELECTRA.

Stranger dost thou weep for me?

ORESTES.

By impious hands to perish thus!

Dust to dust. In the original, it is την μηδεν εις το μηδεν "nothing to nothing;" I have taken the liberty to adopt a phrase familiar to ourselves, and which equally expresses the sense of my author.

ELECTRA.

For me
Doubtless thou weep'st, for I am chang'd indeed.

ORESTES.

Of nuptial rites, and each domestic joy
To live depriv'd!

ELECTRA.

Why dost thou gaze upon me?

ORESTES.

Alas! I did not know I was so wretched.

ELECTRA.

Why, what hath made thee so?

ORESTES.

I see thy woes.

ELECTRA.

Not half of them.

ORESTES.

Can there be worse than these?

ELECTRA.

To live with murderers!

ORESTES.

What murd'rers, whom?

ELECTRA.

The murd'rers of my father; bound to serve them.

ORESTES.

Who binds thee?

ELECTRA.

One who calls herself a mother;
A name she little merits.

ORESTES.

But say, how?
Doth she withhold the means of life, or act
With brutal violence to thee?

ELECTRA.

Both, alas!
Are my hard lot; she tries a thousand means
To make me wretched.

ORESTES.

And will none assist,
Will none defend thee?

ELECTRA.

None. My only hope
Lies buried there.

ORESTES.

O! how I pity thee!

ELECTRA.

'Tis kindly done; for none will pity me,
None but thyself; art thou indeed a stranger,
Or doth some nearer tie unite our sorrows?

ORESTES.

I cou'd unfold a tale; — but, say, these virgins,
May I depend on them?

ELECTRA.

They are our friends,
And faithful all.

ORESTES.

Then lay the urn aside,
And I will tell thee.

ELECTRA.

Do not take it from me;
Do not, dear stranger.

ORESTES.

But I must indeed.

ELECTRA.

Do not, I beg thee.

ORESTES.

Come, you'll not repent it.

ELECTRA.

O! my poor brother! if thy dear remains
Are wrested from me, I am most unhappy.

ORESTES.

No more; thou must not grieve for him.

ELECTRA.

Not grieve

For my Orestes?

ORESTES.

No; you shou'd not weep.

ELECTRA.

Am I unworthy of him then?

ORESTES.

O! no!

But do not grieve.

ELECTRA.

Not when I bear the ashes
Of my dear brother!

ORESTES.

But they are not there,
Unless by fiction, and a well-wrought tale
That hath deceiv'd thee.

ELECTRA.

Where then is his tomb?

ORESTES.

The living need none.

ELECTRA.

Ha! what say'st thou?

ORESTES.

Truth.

ELECTRA.

Does he then live?

ORESTES.

If I have life, he lives.

ELECTRA.

And art thou he?

ORESTES.

Look here, and be convinc'd;
This mark, 'tis from our father.

The living need none. The Greek is τȣ ζωντος ȣκ εςι ταφος, which I have translated literally. Brumoy, who is seldom guilty of mistakes, has let the sense slip him, and only says, "il est plein de vie."

This mark. What this mark was, has greatly puzzled the commentators; the Scholiasts, whose conjectures are generally whimsical, will

ELECTRA.

O! blest hour!

ORESTES.

Blessed indeed!

ELECTRA.

Art thou then here?

ORESTES.

I am.

ELECTRA.

Do I embrace thee?

ORESTES.

May'st thou do it long!

ELECTRA.

O! my companions! O! my dearest friends!
Do ye not see Orestes, once by art
And cruel fiction torn from life and me,
But now by better art to life restor'd?

needs have it to be some remains of the ivory shoulder of Pelops, which was visible in all his descendants, as those of Cadmus were marked with a lance, and the Seleucidæ with an anchor. Camerarius, and after him Brumoy, call it a ring, or seal, which indeed is the most natural interpretation of the Greek word σφραγις; though it may be said, in support of the other opinion, that the natural or bodily mark was more certain, and therefore a better proof of identity in regard to the person of Orestes.

Art thou then there? This discovery is doubtless the principal and most interesting scene in the tragedy of Electra, and upon the whole much better conducted by Sophocles than by either of his rivals on the same subject. The effect which it had upon the audience, was, we may imagine, equal to its merit. Aulus Gellius tells us a remarkable story of a certain actor, named Polus, who having undertaken the part of Electra, in order to enter more fully into the character he was to represent, brought upon the stage an urn containing the ashes of his own son, which he wept over as the ashes of Orestes; his feelings were so intense, and his performance so exquisite on this occasion, that the spectators no longer considered it as a mere representation, but were filled with real grief, and dissolved in tears.

Dacier is of opinion, that the dialogue between Orestes and Electra on this occasion, is too prolix, and must be shortened before it could meet with any applause on a modern theatre.

CHORUS.

Daughter, we do; and see 'midst all our woes
From ev'ry eye fast flow the tears of joy.

ELECTRA.

O! ye are come, my friends, in happiest hour,
E'en to behold, to find again the man
Whom your souls wish'd for, ye are come.

CHORUS.

We are;
But O! in silence hide thy joys, Electra.

ELECTRA.

Wherefore in silence?

CHORUS.

Lest our foes within
Shou'd hear thee.

ELECTRA.

Never, by the virgin pow'r
Of chaste Diana, will I hide my joys,
Nor meanly stoop to fear an idle throng
Of helpless women.

ORESTES.

Women have their pow'r,
And that thou know'st.

ELECTRA.

Alas! and so I do;
For O! thou hast call'd back the sad remembrance
Of that misfortune which admits no cure,
And ne'er can be forgot.

ORESTES.

A fitter time
May come when we must think of that.

O! ye are come, &c. From this place, to that speech of Orestes which begins with, "Spend not thy time," &c. and which contains in the Greek near fifty short lines, the original is in Strophe and Antistrophe: I have made no change in the measure of the translation, for the reason given in a preceding note.

ELECTRA.

All times,
All hours are fit to talk of justice in,
And best the present, now when I am free.

ORESTES.

Thou art so, be so still.

ELECTRA.

What's to be done?

ORESTES.

Talk not, when prudence shou'd restrain thy tongue.

ELECTRA.

Who shall restrain it? who shall bind Electra
To fearful silence, when Orestes comes?
When thus I see thee here, beyond my thoughts,
Beyond my hopes.

ORESTES.

The gods have sent me to thee;
They bade me come.

ELECTRA.

Indeed! more grateful still
Is thy return; if by the gods command
Thou cam'st, the gods will sure protect thee here.

ORESTES.

I wou'd not damp thy joys, and yet I fear
Lest they shou'd carry thee too far.

ELECTRA.

O! no!
But after so long absence, thus return'd
To thy afflicted sister; sure thou would'st not——

ORESTES.

Do what?

ELECTRA.

Thou would'st not grudge me the dear pleasure
Of looking on thee.

ORESTES.

No; nor suffer any
To rob thee of it.

ELECTRA.

Shall I then!

ORESTES.

No doubt.

ELECTRA.

I hear that voice, my friends, I never thought
To hear again; ye know, when I receiv'd
The dreadful news, I kept my grief within,
Silent and sad; but now I have thee here,
Now I behold thee, now I fix my eyes
On that dear form, which never was forgotten.

ORESTES.

Spend not thy time in fruitless words, nor tell me
How Clytemnestra lives, nor how Ægisthus
Hath lavish'd all our wealth; the present hour
Demands our strict attention; tell me how,
Whether by fraud, or open force, our foes
May best be vanquish'd; let no cheerful smile
Betray thee to thy mother; seem to grieve
As thou wert wont; when we have done the deed,
Joy shall appear, and we will smile in safety.

ELECTRA.

Thy will is mine; not to myself I owe
My present bliss, I have it all from thee,
From thee, my brother; nor shou'd aught persuade me
To give Orestes e'en a moment's pain.
That were ungrateful to th' indulgent pow'r,
Who thus hath smil'd propitious. Know, Ægisthus
Has left the palace; Clytemnestra's there;
And for thy needless fears that I shou'd smile,
Or wear a cheerful face, I never shall;
Hatred so strong is rooted in my soul,
The sight of them will make me sad enough.
The tears of joy perhaps may flow for thee,
And add to the deceit; for flow they must,
When I behold thee in one happy hour
Thus snatch'd from life, and thus to life restor'd.

I cou'd not hope it; O! 'tis passing strange!
If from the tomb our father shou'd arise,
And say he liv'd, I think I shou'd believe him;
And O! when thou art come so far, 'tis fit
I yield to thee in all, do thou direct
My ev'ry step; but know had I been left
Alone, e'en I wou'd not have fail'd in all,
But conquer'd bravely, or as bravely fell.

ORESTES.

No more. I hear the footsteps as of one
Coming this way.

ELECTRA.

Strangers, go in, and bear
That which with joy they cannot but receive,
But which with joy they will not long possess.

SCENE II.

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CHORUS.

GOVERNOR.

Madness and folly thus to linger here!
Have ye no thought? is life not worth your care?
Do ye not know the dangers that surround you?
Had I not watch'd myself before the palace,
Ere ye had enter'd, all your secret plan
Had been discover'd to our foes within;
Wherefore no more of this tumultuous joy,
And lengthen'd converse; 'tis not fitting now,
Go in; away, delays are dangerous
At such an hour; our fate depends upon it.

ORESTES.

May I with safety? is all well within?

Strangers go in, &c. Electra, informed that some one was coming towards them, changes her tone and manner, and addresses Orestes and Pylades as strangers; what she says, we may observe, is purposely ambiguous, as she was apprehensive of being overheard.

GOVERNOR.

None can suspect you.

ORESTES.

Spake you of my death
As we determin'd?

GOVERNOR.

Living as thou art,
They do account thee one among the dead.

ORESTES.

And are they glad; what say they?

GOVERNOR.

By and by
We'll talk of that; let it suffice, that all
Is right within; and that which most they think so,
May prove most fatal to them.

ELECTRA, *(pointing to the* GOVERNOR.*)*

Who is this?

ORESTES.

Do you not know?

ELECTRA.

I cannot recollect him.

ORESTES.

Not know the man to whom you trusted me?
Under whose care ——

ELECTRA.

When? how?

ORESTES.

To Phocis sent,
I 'scap'd the tyrant.

ELECTRA.

Can it then be he,
Among the faithless only faithful found
When our dear father fell?

ORESTES.

It is the same.

ELECTRA, *(to the* GOVERNOR.*)*

Dearest of men, great guardian of our race,

Art thou then here? thou, who hast sav'd us both
From countless woes; swift were thy feet to bring
Glad tidings to me, and thy hand stretch'd forth
It's welcome succour; but, O! why deceive me?
Why woud'st thou kill me with thy dreadful tale,
E'en when thou had'st such happiness in store?
Hail! father, hail! for I must call thee so,
Know, thou hast been to me, in one short day,
Both the most hated, and most lov'd of men,

GOVERNOR.

No more of that; we shall have time enough
To talk of it hereafter; let us go;
This is the hour; the queen is now alone,
And not a man within; if ye delay,
Expect to meet more formidable foes,
In wisdom and in numbers far superior.

ORESTES.

We will not talk, my Pylades, but act.
Let us go in; but to the gods, who guard
This place, be first due adoration paid.

ELECTRA.

Hear then, Apollo, great Lycæan, hear
Their humble pray'r! O! hear Electra too,
Who with unsparing hand her choicest gifts
Hath never fail'd to lay before thy altars;
Accept the little all which now remains
For me to give, accept my humblest pray'rs,
My vows, my adorations; smile propitious
On all our counsels! O! assist us now,

Swift were thy feet, &c. The expression in the original is remarkable, ἥδιστον εχων ποδων ὑπηρετημα, dulcissimum habens pedum ministerium; not unlike that of the prophet Isaiah, "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings!"

Hear then, Apollo, &c. Electra's prayer is made before the altar of Apollo, which stood at the entrance of the palace, where Clytemnestra had paid her devotions in the former scene; this gives an air of solemnity to the action, and lessens the horror of the murder, by representing it as an act of piety, and agreeable to the will of heaven.

And shew mankind what punishment remains
For guilty mortals from offended heav'n. [*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Behold, he comes! the slaughter-bearing god
Mars, ever thirsting for the murd'rer's blood;
And, see, the dogs of war are close behind;
Nought can escape their all-devouring rage;
This did my conscious heart long since presage,
And the fair dream that struck my raptur'd mind.

ANTISTROPHE.

Th' avenger steals along with silent feet,
And sharpen'd sword, to his paternal seat,
His injur'd father's wrongs to vindicate;
Conceal'd from all by Maia's fraudful son,
Who safe conducts him till the deed be done,
Nor longer will delay the needful work of fate.
[*Exeunt.*

Behold he comes, &c. This is the fourth intermede or song of the Chorus, and is supposed to divide the fourth and the fifth acts; it is shorter, we may observe, than any of the rest, probably so contrived by the author, to relieve the impatience of the spectator, who is naturally eager to see the catastrophe; it is not therefore a time to amuse him with poetry and description, but to prepare him for the event; which is here done in a few words, finely adapted to that purpose.

The dogs of war. Κυνες αρυκται, Gr. canes inevitabiles. Shakespear has exactly the same image, "Cry havock, and let slip the dogs of war."
See Prologue to Henry the Fifth.

Maia's fraudful son. Mercury was the god of fraud and treachery, and called δολιος, or the deceiver; to him therefore was attributed all secret schemes and expeditions, good or bad. The propriety of Mercury's peculiar assistance in this place, may likewise be accounted for from his relation to Myrtilus, who was slain by Pelops.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

O! MY dear friends, they are about it now,
The deed is doing: but be still.

CHORUS.

What deed?
How? where?

ELECTRA.

She doth prepare the fun'ral banquet;
But they are not far from her.

CHORUS.

Why then leave them?

ELECTRA.

To watch Ægisthus, lest he steal upon us
And blast our purpose.

O my dear friends, &c. To avoid the horror of a murder on the stage, which, however familiar to us, the antients considered as shocking and disgustful, Sophocles has contrived that it shall be done within the palace; but as Electra had received no commands from the oracle to revenge the death of Agamemnon, there would have been an indecency and impropriety in making her a witness or accessary to the murder: she therefore leaves her brother to kill Clytemnestra, and comes out; which at the same time gives her an opportunity of watching the arrival of Ægisthus, and preventing any interruption from him. The appearance of Electra on the stage in this place is absolutely necessary, as without it no reason could be assigned for the return of Orestes; and thus the rest of the business of the drama must have been transacted out of sight of the audience, who would consequently remain strangers to the catastrophe.

The fun'ral banquet. The Greek λέβητα κοσμεῖ, lebetem parat, alluding to the περιδειπνον, or funeral banquet, which was usually spread on the tomb of the deceased by the nearest relation. This banquet Electra imagines that Clytemnestra was already preparing for Orestes, whom she supposed dead: but they, says she, are not far from her; that is, they who are preparing one for her. The sentence, we see, is purposely left unfinished.

CLYTEMNESTRA *(behind the Scenes.)*

O! I am betray'd!
My palace full of murd'rers; not a friend
Left to protect me.

ELECTRA.

Some one cries within;
Did you not hear?

CHORUS.

It is too horrible
For mortal ear; I tremble at the sound.

CLYTEMNESTRA *(within.)*

Ægisthus, O! where art thou?

ELECTRA.

Hark! again
The voice, and louder.

CLYTEMNESTRA *(within.)*

O! my child, my child!
Pity thy mother, pity her who bore thee.

ELECTRA.

Be thine the pity which thou shewd'st to him,
And to his father.

CHORUS.

O! unhappy kingdom!
O! wretched race! thy misery is full;
This day will finish all.

Some one cries within. Dacier puts these words into the mouth of one of the women that compose the Chorus; because, (says he) Electra would never have said "*some one* cries out," as she knew it must be Clytemnestra. The reader may take his choice in regard to this alteration; I have left it as it stands in the original, being a matter of no great consequence.

O! unhappy kingdom! The Chorus, though satisfied that Clytemnestra deserved to die, and that this action of Orestes was commanded by the gods, are notwithstanding shocked at the execution of it: they lament the present, and express their fear of future miseries in the house of Pelops; it is impossible, in their opinion, that a family could ever prosper where a wife had killed her husband, and a child murdered his mother. There is something in this reflection striking and pathetic.

CLYTEMNESTRA *(within.)*

O! I am wounded!

ELECTRA.

Another stroke. Another, if thou can'st.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me! again!

ELECTRA.

O! that Ægisthus too
Groan'd with thee now!

CHORUS.

Then vengeance is complete.
The dead arise and shed their murd'rers' blood
In copious streams.

SCENE II.

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

Behold them here; their hands

Another stroke, &c. "Ce mot fait fremir," (says Brumoy) "these "words make one shudder." Dacier is likewise of opinion, that all the art of the poet is insufficient to reconcile us to the fierceness of Electra. We cannot, (say these gentlemen) hear without horror a sister exhorting her brother to murder her own mother; nature starts at such inhumanity: Orestes should be revenged, but by some other hand. These and many other accusations of the same kind, are brought against Sophocles, who stands indicted of cruelty by the French critics: their delicacy is, it seems, greatly shocked at what they call the atrocity of the action. I am notwithstanding of opinion, that the more indulgent English reader will acquit the poet, when he considers the manners and character of the people before whom the play was represented. The murder of Clytemnestra, we are frequently put in mind, was by command of the oracle: and was therefore looked on by the antients, however contrary to the dictates of nature, as an act of piety. Their idea of fatality was, of itself, sufficient to take away all the horror and cruelty of it; besides which, it may be added in favour of Sophocles, that the story of Clytemnestra, the persons concerned in her death, and every circumstance attending it, was too well known to the whole audience, to admit of any material alteration in the conduct of it.

Dropping with gore, a pious sacrifice
To the great god of war. How is't, Orestes?

ORESTES.

'Tis very well; all's well, if there be truth
In great Apollo's oracles, she's dead.
Thou need'st not fear a cruel mother now.

CHORUS.

No more; Ægisthus comes.

ELECTRA.

Instant go in;
Do you not see him? joyful he returns.

CHORUS.

Retire; thus far is right, go on, and prosper.

ORESTES.

Fear not, we'll do it.

CHORUS.

But immediately.

ORESTES.

I'm gone.

[*Exeunt* ORESTES, PYLADES, *and* GOVERNOR.

ELECTRA.

For what remains here to be done,
Be it my care; I'll whisper in his ear
A few soft flatt'ring words, that he may rush
Unknowing down precipitate on ruin.

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Which of you knows aught of these Phocian guests,
Who come to tell us of Orestes' death?
You first I ask, Electra, once so proud

Which of you knows, &c. Clytemnestra, we are to suppose, on receiving the news of Orestes' death, had sent a message to Ægisthus to acquaint him with it; he returns home therefore immediately to enquire into the particulars.

And fierce of soul; it doth concern you most;
And therefore you, I think, can best inform me.

ELECTRA.

Yes, I can tell thee; is it possible
I shou'd not know it? that were not to know
A circumstance of dearest import to me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Where are they then?

ELECTRA.

Within.

ÆGISTHUS.

And spake they truth?

ELECTRA.

They did; a truth not prov'd by words alone,
But facts undoubted.

ÆGISTHUS.

Shall we see him then?

ELECTRA.

Aye, and a dreadful sight it is to see.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou art not wont to give me so much joy;
Now I am glad indeed.

ELECTRA.

Glad may'st thou be,
If aught there is in that can give thee joy.

ÆGISTHUS.

Silence within, and let my palace gates
Be open'd all; that Argos and Mycenæ
May send her millions forth to view the sight;
And if there are who nourish idle hopes
That still Orestes lives, behold him here,
And learn submission, nor inflame the crowd
Against their lawful sov'reign, lest they feel
An angry monarch's heaviest vengeance on them.

Glad may'st thou be. This speech of Electra, as well as that which goes before it, is purposely ambiguous; Ægisthus believes she is talking of Orestes, whilst she speaks of Clytemnestra.

ELECTRA.

Already I have learn'd the task, and yield
To pow'r superior.

SCENE IV.

Opens and discovers the Body of CLYTEMNESTRA *extended on a Bier, and covered with a Veil.*

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS, AND A CROWD OF SPECTATORS FROM THE CITY.

ÆGISTHUS

What a sight is here!
O! deity supreme! this cou'd not be
But by thy will; and whether Nemesis
Shall still o'ertake me for my crime, I know not.
Take off the veil, that I may view him well;
He was by blood allied, and therefore claims
Our decent sorrows.

ORESTES.

Take it off thyself;
'Tis not my office; thee it best befits
To see and to lament.

ÆGISTHUS.

And so it does;
And I will do it; send Clytemnestra hither.
[*taking off the veil.*

This cou'd not be. The Greek is ουκουν, which, literally translated, answers exactly to our phrase, "it did not *fall out.*"

'Tis not my office. All duties paid to the dead were performed by the nearest relations; Orestes, as supposed to be a stranger, had no business with them; Ægisthus therefore, himself, takes off the veil, which greatly heightens the surprize and horror of the catastrophe.

ORESTES.

She is before thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! what do I see?

ORESTES.

Why, what's the matter? what affrights thee so?
Do you not see him?

ÆGISTHUS.

In what dreadful snare
Am I then fallen?

ORESTES.

Dost thou not now behold
That thou art talking with the dead?

ÆGISTHUS.

Alas!
Too well I see it, and thou art——Orestes.

ORESTES.

So great a prophet thou, and guess so ill!

ÆGISTHUS.

I know that I am lost, undone for ever;

She is before thee. Of all the catastrophes, antient or modern, which I remember to have met with, this of Electra appears to me infinitely the most interesting, natural, and truly dramatic. There cannot possibly be a spectacle more affecting than the scene before us; a tyrant, murderer, and adulterer, is represented as exulting on the death of the only person in the world whom he had to fear, and whose dead body he expects to see before him; instead of this, on lifting up the veil, he is shocked, not with the corpse of Orestes, but that of his own wife; he perceives at once that Clytemnestra is murdered, that Orestes is alive and close to him, and that he has nothing to expect himself but immediate death: the sudden change of fortune to all the persons concerned, the surprise and despair of Ægisthus, the joy and triumph in the countenances of Orestes and Electra, must altogether have exhibited a picture worthy of the pencil of a Raphael to execute: how it was acted on the Greek stage, we cannot pretend to determine, most probably with taste and judgement. Let the English reader conceive those inimitable actors, Quin, Garrick, and Cibber, in the parts of Ægisthus, Orestes, and Electra, and from thence form to himself some idea of the effect which such a catastrophe would have on a British audience.

So great a prophet, &c. This is a sneer of Orestes, on his being discovered by Ægisthus, who had the reputation of a prophet.

But let me speak to thee.

ELECTRA.

Do not Orestes;

No, not a word; what can a moment's space
Profit a wretch like him to death devoted?
Quick let him die, and cast his carcase forth
To dogs and vultures; they will best perform
Fit obsequies for him: by this alone
We can be free and happy.

ORESTES.

Get thee in;

This is no time for talk; thy life, thy life.

ÆGISTHUS.

But why go in? if what thou mean'st to do
Be just, what need of darkness to conceal it?
Why not destroy me here?

ORESTES.

It is not thine

Now to command: hence to the fatal place
Where our dear father fell, and perish there.

ÆGISTHUS.

This palace then is doom'd to be the witness
Of all the present, all the future woes
Of Pelops' hapless race.

ORESTES.

Of thine, at least

They will best perform, &c. Amongst the Greeks, to be deprived of the rites of sepulture, was accounted a punishment worse than death itself. The original doth not mention dogs and vultures, but only says, let him be given ταφευσι, solis pollinctoribus vel libitinariis, to the only buriers (if we may use the expression) that he deserves.

Hence to the fatal place, &c. Ægisthus must be slain on the very spot where he killed Agamemnon; this heightens the justice of the action, and at the same time prevents the spilling of blood on the stage, which Sophocles judiciously avoids. The justice of Orestes puts us in mind of a similar passage in Holy Writ; "in the place where dogs licked the "blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

See 1 Kings, xxi. 19.

Of thine at least, &c. The antients were of opinion, that the words

It shall be witness; that's my prophecy,
And a most true one.

ÆGISTHUS.

'Tis not from thy father.

ORESTES.

Thou talk'st, and time is lost. Away.

ÆGISTHUS.

I follow.

ORESTES.

Thou shalt go first.

ÆGISTHUS.

Think'st thou I mean to fly?

ORESTES.

No; but I'd make thy end most bitter to thee
In ev'ry circumstance, nor let thee choose
The softest means. Were all like thee to perish
Who violate the laws, 'twou'd lessen much
The guilt of mortals, and reform mankind. [*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

O! race of Atreus! after all thy woes,
How art thou thus by one advent'rous deed
To freedom and to happiness restor'd!

of dying men were always prophetic; Ægisthus, therefore, perceiving that his death was determined, foretells the fate of Orestes, doomed to be tormented for the murder of his mother; Orestes interrupts his speech, by assuring him that his own fate was unavoidable: the English reader will recollect a parallel passage in Shakespear, where Richard the Third cuts off the prophecies of Henry the Sixth, with

——— Die, prophet, in thy speech;
For this among the rest was I ordain'd.

PHILOCTETES.

DRAMATIS-PERSONÆ.

ULYSSES, KING OF ITHACA.

NEOPTOLEMUS, SON OF ACHILLES.

PHILOCTETES, SON OF PÆAN AND COMPANION OF HERCULES.

A SPY.

HERCULES.

CHORUS, COMPOSED OF THE COMPANIONS OF ULYSSES AND NEOPTOLEMUS.

SCENE—LEMNOS, NEAR A GROTTO, IN A ROCK BY THE SEA-SIDE.

PHILOCTETES.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, ATTENDANT.

ULYSSES.

At length, my noble friend, thou bravest son
Of a brave father, father of us all,
The great Achilles, we have reach'd the shore
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desart and forlorn,
Where never tread of human step is seen,
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,
Poor Philoctetes, Pæan's wretched son,

Poor Philoctetes, &c. It is reported of Philoctetes, that Hercules, at his death on mount Hyllus, bequeathed to him, as a testimony of his esteem, his bow and arrows; the extraordinary virtues of which we shall find frequently alluded to in this piece. Philoctetes after this, being in search of an altar dedicated to his deceased friend, in the island of Chrysa, was there bit by a serpent; the wound festered, and an incurable ulcer ensued, notwithstanding which he proceeded in his voyage to assist at the siege of Troy; where the wound growing desperate, his continual cries and groans interrupted the motions of the war, and probably disheartened the soldiers; the Grecian chiefs therefore thought it adviseable to remove him from the army. A superstitious belief was instilled into the multitude, that Philoctetes was struck by the hand of the gods with an incurable distemper; and Ulysses was ordered to carry him to Lemnos, an uninhabited island in the Ægean sea, and leave him there to the care of Providence. In this miserable situation he remained for ten years; the Greeks in the mean time are informed by an oracle, that Troy could never be conquered without the arrows of Hercules, then in the possession of Philoctetes. Ulysses and Neoptolemus are dispatched with commands to bring him to the siege. The manner in which this expedition was conducted, and the means made use of by the artful Ulysses to gain the arrows of Hercules, constitute the subject

Whom here I left; for such were my commands
From Grecia's chiefs, when by his fatal wound
Oppress'd, his groans and execrations dreadful
Alarm'd our hosts, our sacred rites profan'd,
And interrupted holy sacrifice.
But why shou'd I repeat the tale; the time
Admits not of delay, we must not linger,
Lest he discover our arrival here,
And all our purpos'd fraud to draw him hence
Be ineffectual; lend me then thy aid:
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock
With double entrance; to the sun's warm rays
In winter open, and in summer's heat
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze?
A little to the left, there is a fountain
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes
He slakes his thirst; if aught thou see'st of this,
Inform me; so shall each to each impart
Council most fit, and serve our common cause.

NEOPTOLEMUS *(leaving* ULYSSES *a little behind him.)*

If I mistake not, I behold a cave,
E'en such as thou describ'st.

ULYSSES.

Dost thou? which way?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Yonder it is; but no path leading thither,
Or trace of human footstep.

ULYSSES.

In his cell

of the tragedy: which, though extremely barren of dramatic incidents, and divested of every theatrical ornament, abounds at the same time in such amiable simplicity, such strength of colouring, and propriety of character and manners, as may, perhaps, render it even more pleasing to the judicious and classical reader, than those plays of Sophocles, where the fable is apparently more interesting, and the manners much more similar to our own. The celebrated archbishop of Cambray was so struck with the story of Philoctetes, that he has taken the pains to weave it into his excellent work, where it forms a very beautiful episode. See Telemaque, b. 15.

A chance but he hath lain him down to rest;
Look if he hath not.

NEOPTOLEMUS *(advancing to the Cave.)*

Not a creature there.

ULYSSES.

Nor food, nor mark of household preparation?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A rustic bed of scatter'd leaves.

ULYSSES.

What more?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand,
With a few sticks for fuel.

ULYSSES.

This is all
His little treasure here.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Unhappy man!
Some linen for his wounds.

ULYSSES.

This must be then
His place of habitation; far from hence
He cannot roam; distemper'd as he is,
It were impossible; he is but gone
A little way for needful food, or herb
Of pow'r to 'swage and mitigate his pain.
Wherefore dispatch this servant to some place
Of observation, whence he may espy
His ev'ry motion, lest he rush upon us.
There's not a Grecian whom his soul so much
Cou'd wish to crush beneath him as Ulysses.

[*Makes a signal to the Attendant, who retires.*

SCENE II.

NEOPTOLEMUS, ULYSSES.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He's gone to guard each avenue; and now,
If thou hast aught of moment to impart
Touching our purpose, say it; I attend.

ULYSSES.

Son of Achilles, mark me well; remember,
What we are doing not on strength alone,
Or courage, but on conduct will depend;
Therefore if aught uncommon be propos'd,
Strange to thy ears, and adverse to thy nature,
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,
And act conjunctive with me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Well! what is it?

ULYSSES.

We must deceive this Philoctetes; that
Will be thy task; when he shall ask thee who
And what thou art, Achilles' son, reply;
Thus far within the verge of truth, no more;
Add, that resentment fir'd thee to forsake
The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,
Unkindly us'd by those who long with vows
Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy,
And when thou com'st, ungrateful as they were,
The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,
Gave to Ulysses; here thy bitter taunts

The arms of great Achilles. The contest concerning the arms of Achilles, was solely between Ajax and Ulysses; we have no account that Neoptolemus laid claim to them. As Philoctetes, however, had been absent during the whole affair, Ulysses was at liberty to substitute Neoptolemus in the room of Ajax, especially as his being the son of Achilles, naturally justified his pretensions to the arms of his father; the fiction therefore was probable.

And sharp invectives lib'rally bestow
On me; say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,
And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not;
For against Troy thy efforts are all vain
Without his arrows: safely thou may'st hold
Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot.
Thou wert not with us when the war began,
Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host
As I was; me he knows, and if he find
That I am with thee, we are both undone.
They must be ours then, these all-conqu'ring arms;
Remember that. I know thy noble nature
Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud;
But what a glorious prize is victory!
Therefore be bold; we will be just hereafter.
Give to deceit and me a little portion
Of one short day, and for thy future life
Be call'd the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,
Son of Laertes, I shall never practise.
I was not born to flatter or betray;

These all-conqu'ring arms. A dispute concerning a bow and arrows may probably seem to a modern critic but an unpromising subject for a tragedy; but the defenders of Sophocles must desire him to recollect, that on those arrows, however uninteresting the circumstance may at first appear, depended no less than the fate of a whole nation; politically considered therefore, it was a point of the utmost consequence; if the poet had not thought so, he would certainly have been inexcusable in bringing down a deity at last, as we shall see in the catastrophe, to determine it.

We will be just hereafter. This advice is put with great propriety into the mouth of the artful Ulysses, who, like other subtle panders to vice, persuades his friend to the commission of a crime, and at the same time proposes the palliative of future repentance and virtue; an evasive and subtle excuse for guilt, which has perhaps done more injury to the cause of religion and truth than any other whatsoever. Neoptolemus answers it with all the honest indignation that such a sentiment deserved. The characters, we may observe, of the two heroes are finely contrasted, and serve, like light and shade, greatly to animate and enliven the whole beautiful picture.

Nor I, nor he (the voice of fame reports)
Who gave me birth; what open arms can do
Behold me prompt to act, but ne'er to fraud
Will I descend; sure we can more than match
In strength a foe thus lame and impotent.
I came to be a helpmate to thee, not
A base betrayer; and O! King, believe me,
Rather, much rather would I fall by virtue,
That rise by guilt to certain victory.

ULYSSES.

O! noble youth, and worthy of thy sire,
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength
And courage boastful, little did I deem
Of human policy; but long experience
Hath taught me, son, 'tis not the pow'rful arm
But soft enchanting tongue that governs all.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And thou would'st have me tell an odious falsehood?

ULYSSES.

He must be gain'd by fraud.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By fraud? and why
Not by persuasion?

ULYSSES.

He'll not listen to it;
And force were vainer still.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What mighty pow'r
Hath he to boast?

ULYSSES.

His arrows wing'd with death
Inevitable.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Then it were not safe
E'en to approach him.

ULYSSES.

No; unless by fraud
He be secur'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And think'st thou 'tis not base
To tell a lie then?

ULYSSES.

Not if on that lie
Depends our safety.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Who shall dare to tell it
Without a blush?

ULYSSES.

We need not blush at aught
That may promote our int'rest and success.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But where's the int'rest that shou'd bias me?
Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught
To Neoptolemus?

ULYSSES.

Troy cannot fall
Without his arrows.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Said'st thou not, that I
Was destin'd to destroy her?

ULYSSES.

Without them
Nought canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Then I must have them.

Think'st thou 'tis not base, &c. The character of Neoptolemus is copied from that of his father, who is represented by Homer as of an open and ingenuous disposition, and a foe to lying and dissimulation; in the ninth book of the Iliad, he cries out,

Εχθρος γαρ μοι κεινος ομως αιδαο πυλῃσιν,
Ος χ' ἑτερον μεν κευθει ενι φρεσιν, αλλο δε βαζει.

Who dares think one thing, and another tell,
My heart detests him at the gates of hell. POPE.

words that deserve, though from a heathen writer, to be written in letters of gold, and graven, as Solomon says, in the tablets of the heart.

Then I must have them. The struggle between ambition and virtue in the breast of Neoptolemus, is natural and affecting. The subtle Ulysses had

ULYSSES.

When thou hast, remember
A double prize awaits thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What, Ulysses?

ULYSSES.

The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Away; I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame
No more appall me.

ULYSSES.

Wilt thou do it then?
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Depend on't; I have promis'd; that's sufficient.

ULYSSES.

Here then remain thou; I must not be seen;
If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy
Who in a sailor's habit well disguis'd
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,
What best may suit our purpose thou shalt know.
I'll to the ship; farewel; and may the god
Who brought us here, the fraudful Mercury,
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,
And ever kind to me, protect us still! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

CHORUS, NEOPTOLEMUS.

CHORUS.

Master instruct us, strangers as we are,

discovered that his foible was the love of glory, and therefore attacks him in the only part where he was open to persuasion. The virtue of Neoptolemus staggers at the reward proposed, and he submits to a treachery which his soul abhors.

The fraudful Mercury. See note on Electra, p. 123.

Master, instruct us, &c. According to the original design of the Chorus, their chief business was to take the part of distressed virtue; to coun-

What we may utter, what we must conceal.
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?
To those alone belongs the art to rule
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove;
To thee of right devolves the pow'r supreme,
From thy great ancestors deliver'd down;
Speak then, our royal lord, and we obey.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If you wou'd penetrate yon deep recess
To seek the cave where Philoctetes lies,
Go forward; but remember to return
When the poor wand'rer comes this way, prepar'd
To aid our purpose here, if need require.

CHORUS.

O! king, we ever meant to fix our eyes
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will;
But, tell us, in what part is he conceal'd?
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserv'd
He rush upon us; which way doth it lie?
See'st thou his footsteps leading from the cave,
Or hither bent?

NEOPTOLEMUS, *(advancing towards the Cave.)*

Behold the double door
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.

teract the bad effects that might arise from vicious characters, and to draw moral inferences from the action of the drama: they are generally therefore, as in the two preceding plays of Ajax and Electra, attendants on, and friends to the hero or heroine of the piece; a propriety which the subject of the tragedy before us would by no means admit, the distress of Philoctetes arising in a great measure from his being left alone in the island; the Chorus, for this reason, is composed not of the friends of the hero, but the soldiers and followers of Ulysses and Neoptolemus; we must not be surprised therefore to find them conspiring with their masters to deceive Philoctetes, and throughout the play aiding and assisting the designs of their commanders; they, notwithstanding, perform the officium virile prescribed by Horace, and express their pity and concern for the man, whom it is not in their power to relieve.

CHORUS.

And whither is its wretched master gone?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Doubtless in search of food, and not far off;
For such his manner is; accustom'd here
So fame reports, to pierce with winged arrows
His savage prey for daily sustenance,
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.

CHORUS.

Alas! I pity him; without a friend,
Without a fellow-suff'rer, left alone,
Depriv'd of all the mutual joys that flow
From sweet society, distemper'd too;
How can he bear it? O! unhappy race
Of mortal man! doom'd to an endless round
Of sorrows, and immeasurable woe!
Second to none in fair nobility
Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race;
Yet here he lies, from ev'ry human aid
Far off remov'd, in dreadful solitude,
And mingles with the wild and savage herd;
With them in famine and in misery
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate,
Unheeded, save when babbling echo mourns
In bitt'rest notes responsive to his woe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And yet I wonder not; for if aright
I judge, from angry heav'n the sentence came;

Alas! I pity him, &c. The lamentation of the Chorus in this scene, as it stands in the original, is in Strophe and Antistrophe, and was therefore most probably, as I have before observed, set to music and sung; but as it makes at the same time part of their conversation with Neoptolemus, I could not throw it into ode or rhyme without interrupting the narration, and giving a motley appearance to the dialogue; I have therefore left it in blank verse. The description of Philoctetes's distress, in this passage, is in the Greek inimitably beautiful, which I have endeavoured to give my readers some imperfect idea of in the translation.

From angry heaven, &c. The story of Philoctetes, as related in the

And Chrysa was the cruel source of all;
Nor doth this sad disease inflict him still
Incurable, without assenting gods;
For so they have decreed, lest Troy shou'd fall
Beneath his arrows ere th' appointed time
Of its destruction come.

CHORUS.

No more, my son;

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What say'st thou?

CHORUS.

Sure I heard a dismal groan
Of some afflicted wretch.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Which way?

CHORUS.

E'en now
I hear it, and the sound as of some step
Slow-moving this way, he is not far from us;
His plaints are louder now; prepare, my son.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

For what?

CHORUS.

New troubles; for behold he comes;
Not like the shepherd with his rural pipe
And cheerful song, but groaning heavily;
Either his wounded foot against some thorn
Hath struck, and pains him sorely, or perchance

fifteenth book of Telemaque, differs from that of Sophocles in this particular; Philoctetes there informs Telemachus, that he dropped by chance one of the arrows of Hercules on his own foot, and that the wound remained for a long time incurable. He likewise attributes this misfortune, and all the distress which he suffered at Lemnos, to his crime in discovering to Ulysses the place where Hercules died and which he had solemnly sworn to conceal. The gods therefore punished him for his perjury.

Not like the Shepherd, &c. Otway has caught this image in his Orphan.

"Sweet as the shepherd's pipe upon the mountain."

He hath espied from far some ship attempting
To enter this inhospitable port,
And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

Say, welcome strangers, what disastrous fate
Led you to this inhospitable shore,
Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit
Affording ever? of what clime, what race?
Who are ye? speak; if I may trust that garb
Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece,
My much-lov'd country; let me hear the sound
Of your long-wish'd for voices; do not look
With horror on me, but in kind compassion
Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn
In this sad place; O! if ye come as friends,
Speak then, and answer, hold some converse with me,
For this at least from man to man is due.

Say, welcome strangers, &c. The absurdity of dividing the Greek tragedies into five acts, which is perpetually recurring to us, appears remarkably evident in this place. Brumoy was obliged to make this the beginning of the second act, though it is apparent the stage is not empty. Philoctetes enters to Neoptolemus and the Chorus whilst they are talking of him. There was, however, no other method of dividing the play, without making the first act three times as long as any of the rest; I have therefore followed this division merely for a pause to the English reader.

Do not look, &c. Philoctetes, we may naturally imagine, after ten years stay on an uninhabited island, made but an uncouth and savage appearance; this address to the Chorus therefore, who are shocked at his figure, is extremely natural, as is indeed almost every thing which Sophocles puts into the mouths of every character in the drama.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Know, stranger, first what most thou seem'st to wish;
We are of Greece.

PHILOCTETES.

O! happiness to hear!
After so many years of dreadful silence,
How welcome was that sound! O! tell me, son,
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?
What brought thee hither, what propitious gale?
Who art thou? tell me all; inform me quickly.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Native of Scyros, thither I return;
My name is Neoptolemus, the son
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHILOCTETES.

Dear is thy country, and thy father dear
To me, thou darling of old Lycomede;
But tell me in what fleet, and whence thou cam'st.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

From Troy.

PHILOCTETES.

From Troy? I think thou wert not with us
When first our fleet sail'd forth.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wert thou then there?
Or know'st thou aught of that great enterprise?

PHILOCTETES.

Know you not then the man whom you behold?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How shou'd I know whom I had never seen?

Native of Scyros, &c. Scyros was an island in the Ægean sea, of which Lycomedes was king; hither Achilles was brought in woman's apparel to avoid the Trojan war, and falling in love with Deidamia, the king's daughter, had by her Pyrrhus, otherwise called Neoptolemus. This explains what follows, where Philoctetes calls him "the darling of old Lycomede."

PHILOCTETES.

Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my name?
Hath my sad story never reach'd your ear?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Never.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! how hateful to the gods,
How very poor a wretch must I be then,
That Greece shou'd never hear of woes like mine!
But they who sent me hither, they conceal'd them,
And smile triumphant, whilst my cruel wounds
Grow deeper still. O! sprung from great Achilles,
Behold before thee Pæan's wretched son,
With whom, a chance but thou hast heard, remain
The dreadful arrows of renown'd Alcides,
E'en the unhappy Philoctetes, him
Whom the Atridæ and the vile Ulysses
Inhuman left, distemper'd as I was
By the envenom'd serpent's deep-felt wound;
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppress'd,
Sleep had o'erta'en me on the hollow rock,
There did they leave me when from Chrysa's shore
They bent their fatal course; a little food
And these few rags were all they wou'd bestow;
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,
How dreadful, think'st thou, was that waking to me,
When from my sleep I rose and saw them not!
How did I weep! and mourn my wretched state!

How did I weep, &c. The character of Melisander in the Agamemnon of Thomson, is a close imitation of Philoctetes. Our excellent descriptive poet has there transfused the spirit of Sophocles, and painted the miseries of solitude in the warmest colours. Thomson even improves on the passage before us, in the following lines, which are so beautiful that I cannot help transcribing them:

Cast on the wildest of the Cyclade isles,
Where never human foot had mark'd the shore,
These ruffians left me —— yet, believe me, Arcas,

When not a ship remain'd of all the fleet
That brought me here; no kind companion left
To minister or needful food or balm
To my sad wounds: on ev'ry side I look'd,
And nothing saw but woe; of that indeed
Measure too full: for day succeeded day,
And still no comfort came; myself alone
Cou'd to myself the means of life afford,
In this poor grotto; on my bow I liv'd:
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,
With pain I brought into my little hut,
And feasted there; then from the broken ice
I slak'd my thirst, or crept into the wood
For useful fuel; from the stricken flint
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still,
And still revives; this with my humble roof
Preserve me, son; but, O! my wounds remain!
Thou see'st an island desolate and waste;
No friendly port, nor hopes of gain to tempt,
Nor host to welcome in the traveller;
Few seek the wild inhospitable shore.
By adverse winds, sometimes th' unwilling guests,
As well thou mayst suppose, were hither driv'n;
But when they came, they only pitied me,

Such is the rooted love we bear mankind,
All ruffians as they were, I never heard
A sound so dismal as their parting oars.
See Thomson's Agam. Act 3.

The sentiment in the two last lines is remarkably natural and pathetic; but I refer my readers to the play itself, which abounds in many fine imitations of the antient tragedy.

The winged dove, &c.

Herbs were my food, those blessed stores of health;
Only, when winter from my daily search
Withdrew my verdant meal, I was oblig'd
In faithless snares to seize, which truly griev'd me,
My sylvan friends, that ne'er till then had known,
And therefore dreaded less the tyrant man.
See Thomson's Agamemnon.

Gave me a little food, or better garb
To shield me from the cold; in vain I pray'd
That they wou'd bear me to my native soil,
For none wou'd listen: here for ten long years
Have I remain'd, whilst misery and famine
Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.
This have th' Atridæ and Ulysses done,
And may the gods with equal woes repay them!

CHORUS.

O! son of Pæan, well might those, who came
And saw thee thus, in kind compassion weep;
I too must pity thee; I can no more.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I can bear witness to thee, for I know
By sad experience what th' Atridæ are,
And what Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES.

Hast thou suffer'd then?
And dost thou hate them too?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O! that these hands
Cou'd vindicate my wrongs! Mycenæ then
And Sparta shou'd confess that Scyros boasts
Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

PHILOCTETES.

O! noble youth! but wherefore cam'st thou hither?
Whence this resentment?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will tell thee all,
If I can bear to tell it: know then, soon
As great Achilles died ——

PHILOCTETES.

—— O! stay, my son,

Mycenæ then, and Sparta, &c. The two cities of Peloponnesus. Neoptolemus here threatens Agamemnon and Menelaus, the former of whom was king of Mycenæ, and the latter of Sparta.

Is then Achilles dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He is, and not
By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft
Fell glorious.

PHILOCTETES.

O! most worthy of each other,
The slayer and the slain! permit me, son,
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine. [*he weeps.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas! thou need'st not weep for other's woes,
Thou hast enough already of thy own.

PHILOCTETES.

'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thus then it was. Soon as Achilles died,
Phœnix, the guardian of his tender years,
Instant sail'd forth, and sought me out at Scyros;
With him the wary chief Ulysses came;
They told me then (or true or false I know not)
My father dead, by me, and me alone
Proud Troy must fall; I yielded to their pray'rs;
I hop'd to see at least the dear remains
Of him, whom living I had long in vain
Wish'd to behold; safe at Sigeum's port
Soon we arriv'd; in crowds the num'rous host
Throng'd to embrace me, call'd the gods to witness
In me once more they saw their lov'd Achilles
To life restor'd; but he, alas! was gone.
I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends
Th' Atridæ, (friends I thought 'em) claim'd the arms
Of my dead father, and what else remain'd
His late possession, when, O! cruel words!

By Apollo's shaft. Homer, and after him Virgil, makes Phœbus assist Paris in the death of Achilles, by wounding him with an arrow in the heel, the only part of him that was vulnerable.

Phœnix, &c. See Homer, book 9.

And wretched I to hear them! thus they answer'd;
"Son of Achilles, thou in vain demand'st
"Those arms already to Ulysses giv'n;
"The rest be thine;" I wept; "And is it thus,"
Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give
"My right away?" "Know, boy," Ulysses cried,
"That right was mine, and therefore they bestow'd
"The boon on me; me who preserv'd the arms
"And him who bore them too." With anger fir'd
At this proud speech, I threaten'd all that rage
Cou'd dictate to me if he not return'd them.
Stung with my words, yet calm, he answer'd me;
"Thou wert not with us; thou wert in a place,
"Where thou should'st not have been; and since thou mean'st
"To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear
"Those arms with thee to Scyros; 'tis resolv'd."
Thus injur'd, thus depriv'd of all I held
Most precious, by the worst of men, I left
The hateful place, and seek my native soil;
Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses
As his base masters: army, city, all —
Depend on those who rule: when men grow vile
The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked.
I've told thee all, and him who hates the Atridæ
I hold a friend to me, and to the gods.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

O Earth; thou mother of great Jove,

And him who bore them. Ulysses was reported to have taken away the dead body of Achilles from the Trojans, and carried it off the field of battle to the Grecian camp. Ovid mentions this in his account of the contest;

His humeris, his inquam humeris, ego corpus Achillis
Et simul arma tuli. Metam. book 15.

O! Earth, &c. This is an occasional song of the Chorus, which is very short, consisting only of a Strophe of thirteen lines in the original, we

Embracing all with universal love,
Author benign of ev'ry good,
Thro' whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood,
To thee, whom in thy rapid ear
Fierce lions draw, I rose and made my pray'r,
To thee I made my sorrows known,
When from Achilles' injur'd son
Th' Atridæ gave the prize, that fatal day
When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

PHILOCTETES.

I wonder not, my friend, to see you here,
And I believe the tale; for well I know
The man who wrong'd you, know the base Ulysses;
Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and nought
That's just or good can be expected from him;
But strange it is to me, that, Ajax present,
He dare attempt it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ajax is no more;
Had he been living, I had ne'er been spoil'd
Thus of my right.

PHILOCTETES.

Is he then dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He is.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! the son of Tydeus, and that slave,
Sold by his father Sisyphus, they live,
Unworthy as they are.

shall find the Antistrophe at a considerable distance from it, breaking the dialogue in a manner very uncommon.

Embracing all, &c. The earth, under the various names of Cybele, Ops, Rhea, and Vesta, called the mother of the gods, was worshipped in Phrygia and Lybia, where the river Pactolus is said to have enriched Crœsus with its sands. Cybele is represented by the poets as drawn by lions.

Son of Tydeus. Diomede.

Sold by his father, &c. It was reported that Anticlea was taken away

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas! they do,
And flourish still.

PHILOCTETES.

My old and worthy friend
The Pylian sage, how is he? he cou'd see
Their arts, and wou'd have giv'n them better counsels.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Weigh'd down with grief he lives, but most unhappy,
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.

PHILOCTETES.

O! double woe! whom I cou'd most have wish'd
To live and to be happy, those to perish!
Ulysses to survive! it shou'd not be.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O! 'tis a subtle foe; but deepest plans
May sometimes fail.

by Laertes after her marriage with Sisyphus, and when she was with child of Ulysses, for which Sisyphus the first husband received a sum of money; Ulysses therefore was often reproached with being the son of Sisyphus. See a note on Ajax, p. 12.

The Pylian sage. Nestor, king of Pylos. Agamemnon had such an opinion of his wisdom, that Homer makes him say, if he had ten such counsellors Troy would soon fall before him.

Weeps his lost son. Antilochus was slain by Memnon in the Trojan war. See Homer's Od. B. 4.

O! 'tis a subtle foe. The original is

Σοφος παλαιστης κεινος· αλλα χειι σοφαι
Γνωμαι, φιλοκτητ', εμπεδιζονται δολαι.

which Brumoy translates thus, 'Antiloque étoit brave, mais la valeur 'est souvent mal recompensée, 'Antilochus was brave, but valour is 'often ill-rewarded.' The sense of this passage, says he, is doubtful, but it certainly alludes to Antiloclus. With all due deference to Mr. Brumoy's judgment, I cannot help thinking that he is here mistaken. Philoctetes had just observed that Ulysses still lived; and Neoptolemus immediately answers, 'O! he is a subtle foe,' Σοφος παλαιστης, 'a cunning wrestler.' Sophocles must certainly mean Ulysses, for how can Σοφος (according to Brumoy's translation) signify brave, or Σοφαι γνωμαι be interpreted valour? Thomson had apparently this very passage in his eye, when he makes Melisander say,

"Malice often over-shoots itself."

PHILOCTETES.

Where was Patroclus then,
Thy father's dearest friend?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He too was dead,
In war, alas! so fate ordains it ever,
The coward 'scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.

PHILOCTETES.

It is too true; and now thou talk'st of cowards,
Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,
Subtle and voluble?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ulysses?

PHILOCTETES.

No;
Thersites; ever talking, never heard.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

PHILOCTETES.

I did not doubt it: evil never dies;
The gods take care of that: if aught there be
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe; the good and just
Perish unpity'd by them; wherefore is it?
When gods do ill, why shou'd we worship them?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Since thus it is, since virtue is oppress'd,
And vice triumphant, who deserve to live
Are doom'd to perish, and the guilty reign;
Henceforth, O! son of Pæan, far from Troy
And the Atridæ will I live remote.
I wou'd not see the man I cannot love.
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,

Thersites. For the character of Thersites, see Homer's Iliad, B. 2.

Since thus it is, &c. Addison had probably this passage in view, when he makes his Cato say,

"When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway,
"The post of honour is a private station."

And home-felt joys delight my future days.
So, fare thee well, and may th' indulgent gods
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee ev'ry wish
Thy soul can form! once more, farewell. I go,
The first propitious gale.

PHILOCTETES.

What! now, my son?
So soon?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Immediately; the time demands
We shou'd be near, and ready to depart.

PHILOCTETES.

Now, by the mem'ry of thy honour'd sire,
By thy lov'd mother, by whate'er remains
On earth most dear to thee, O! hear me now,
Thy suppliant; do not, do not thus forsake me,
Alone, oppress'd, deserted, as thou see'st,
In this sad place; I shall, I know it must be
A burthen to thee, but, O! bear it kindly,
For ever doth the noble mind abhor
Th' ungen'rous deed, and loves humanity;
Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me,
If not, immortal fame rewards thy goodness.
Thou may'st convey me safe to Œta's shores
In one short day; I'll trouble you no longer;
Hide me in any part where I may least
Molest you. Hear me; by the guardian god
Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,
I beg, behold me at thy feet, infirm,
And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees;
Leave me not here then, where there is no mark
Of human footstep; take me to thy home,
Or to Eubœa's port, to Œta, thence

Hide me in any part. The original says, "throw me into the sink, "foredeck, or stern;" there was no necessity of specifying these in the translation.

To Eubœa's port, &c. Eubœa was a large island in the Ægean sea,

Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks
Of Sperchius' gentle stream, to meet my father,
If yet he lives; for, oh! I begg'd him oft
By those who hither came, to fetch me hence.
Or he is dead, or they neglectful bent
Their hasty course to their own native soil.
Be thou my better guide; pity and save
The poor and wretched. Think, my son, how frail
And full of danger is the state of man,
Now prosperous, now adverse; who feels no ills
Shou'd therefore fear them; and when fortune smiles
Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come
Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

CHORUS.

O! pity him, my lord, for bitt'rest woes
And trials most severe he hath recounted;
Far be such sad distress from those I love!
O! if thou hat'st the base Atridæ, now
Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe;
Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil;
So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath
Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Your proffer'd kindness, friends, may cost you dear;
When you shall feel his dreadful malady
Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

CHORUS.

Never
Shall that reproach be ours.

now called Negropont. Œta, a mountain in Thessaly, now called Bunina.

When fortune smiles, &c. This is almost literally translated, and the exact sense of the original. Brumoy has added, "c'est alors qu'il est "beau de secourir les malheureux," "this is the time when it most be- "comes us to succour the unhappy;" a sentiment not improper in the mouth of Philoctetes, but which is not in Sophocles.

O! pity him, &c. This, in the original, is the antistrophe to the little song of the Chorus, which I took notice of p. 152. The reason why I have not put it into the same measure as the other is sufficiently obvious.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In gen'rous pity
Of the afflicted thus to be o'ercome
Were most disgraceful to me; he shall go.
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,
And guide our vessels to the wish'd-for shore!

PHILOCTETES.

O! happy hour! O! kindest, best of men!
And you my dearest friends! how shall I thank you?
What shall I do to shew my grateful heart?
Let us be gone, but O! permit me first
To take a last farewel of my poor hut,
Where I so long have liv'd; perhaps you'll say
I must have had a noble mind to bear it;
The very sight to any eyes but mine
Were horrible, but sad necessity
At length prevail'd, and made it pleasing to me.

CHORUS.

One from our ship, my lord, and with him comes
A stranger; stop a moment till we hear
Their bus'ness with us.

[*Enter a* SPY *in the Habit of a Merchant, with another Grecian.*

SCENE II.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS, SPY.

SPY.

Son of great Achilles,
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driv'n

The wish'd-for shore. In the original, 'the place which we wish to 'sail to.' The expression, we see, is purposely ambiguous; Neoptolemus means Troy, and Philoctetes understands it as spoken of Scyros, his native country.

My poor hut. The Greek is ποικον εισοικησιν, 'my unhabitable habitation;' this would not bear a literal translation.

Son of great Achilles, &c. This spy is probably the same person who

By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay,
As home I sail'd from Troy; there did I meet
This my companion, who inform'd me where
Thou might'st be found: hence to pursue my course
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near
Had been ungen'rous, thou perhaps mean time
Of Greece and of her counsels nought suspecting,
Counsels against thee not by threats alone
Or words enforc'd, but now in execution.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now by my virtue, stranger, for thy news
I am much bound to thee, and will repay
Thy service; tell me what the Greeks have done.

SPY.

A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,
Conducted by old Phœnix, and the sons
Of valiant Theseus.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Come they then to force me?
Or am I to be won by their persuasion?

SPY.

I know not that; you have what I cou'd learn.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And did th' Atridæ send them?

SPY.

Sent they are,
And will be with you soon.

made his appearance in the first scene, and was sent out to watch Philoctetes. Ulysses sends him back in the disguise of a merchant, to carry on the plot, and hasten as much as possible the departure of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes. Ulysses had already desired Neoptolemus to frame his answers according to the hints given him by the spy, and to act in concert with him; Neoptolemus, therefore, purposely turns the discourse to Ulysses, to give the spy an opportunity of mentioning his design on Philoctetes. He blends truth and falsehood, we see, together as artfully as possible, which prevents the least suspicion of fraud or treachery.

The sons of Theseus. Acamas and Demophoon.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But wherefore then
Came not Ulysses? did his courage fail?

SPY.

He, ere I left the camp, with Diomede
On some important embassy sail'd forth
In search——

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Of whom?

SPY.

There was a man——but stay,
Who is thy friend here, tell me, but speak softly.
[*whispering him.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The famous Philoctetes.

SPY.

Ha! begone then,
Ask me no more; away, immediately.

PHILOCTETES.

What do these dark mysterious whispers mean?
Concern they me, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know not what
He means to say, but I wou'd have him speak
Boldly before us all, whate'er it be.

SPY.

Do not betray me to the Grecian host,
Nor make me speak what I wou'd fain conceal;
I am but poor; they have befriended me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In me thou see'st an enemy confest
To the Atridæ; this is my best friend
Because he hates them too; if thou art mine,
Hide nothing then.

SPY.

Consider first.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have.

SPY.

The blame will be on you.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why, let it be;
But speak, I charge thee.

SPY.

Since I must then, know,
In solemn league combin'd, the bold Ulysses,
And gallant Diomede have sworn, by force
Or by persuasion to bring back thy friend:
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare
His purpose; far more resolute he seem'd
Than Diomede, and surer of success.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But why th' Atridæ, after so long time,
Again shou'd wish to see this wretched exile,
Whence this desire? came it from th' angry gods
To punish thus their inhumanity?

SPY.

I can inform you; for perhaps from Greece
Of late you have not heard: there was a prophet,
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name,
Him, in his midnight walks, the wily chief
Ulysses, curse of ev'ry tongue, espied;
Took him, and led him captive, to the Greeks
A welcome spoil; much he foretold to all,
And added last, that Troy shou'd never fall
Till Philoctetes from this isle return'd;
Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave
To fetch him hence; he hop'd by gentle means
To gain him; those successless, force at last
Cou'd but compel him; he wou'd go, he cried,
And if he fail'd, his head shou'd pay the forfeit.
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,
Thou and thy friend, if thou would'st wish to save him.

PHILOCTETES.

And does the traitor think he can persuade *me*?
As well might he persuade me to return
From death to life, as his base father did.

SPY.

Of that I know not: I must to my ship;
Farewell, and may the gods protect you both! [*Exit.*

PHILOCTETES.

Lead me, expose me to the Grecian host!
And cou'd the insolent Ulysses hope
With his soft flatt'ries e'er to conquer me?
No; sooner wou'd I listen to the voice
Of that fell serpent, whose envenom'd tongue
Hath lam'd me thus; but what is there he dare not
Or say or do? I know he will be here
E'en now, depend on't; therefore, let's away;
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses;
Let us be gone; for well-tim'd expedition,
The task perform'd, brings safety and repose.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Soon as the wind permits us, we embark,
But now 'tis adverse.

PHILOCTETES.

Ev'ry wind is fair,
When we are flying from misfortune.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

True;

His father. Sisyphus; imagined by many to be the father of Ulysses: concerning whom a superstitious report prevailed, that having on his death-bed desired his wife not to bury him, on his arrival in the infernal regions, he complained to Pluto of her cruelty, in not performing the funeral obsequies, and was by him permitted, on promise of immediate return, to revisit this world, in order to punish her for the neglect; but when he came to earth, being unwilling to go back to Tartarus, he was compelled by Mercury. It is necessary to the understanding of Sophocles, that the English reader should be familiar with, and reconciled to all these absurdities contained in the mythology and religion of the Greeks.

And 'tis against them too.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! no storms
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I'm ready; take what may be necessary,
And follow me.

PHILOCTETES.

I want not much.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Perhaps
My ship will furnish you.

PHILOCTETES.

There is a plant
Which to my wound gives some relief; I must
Have that.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Is there aught else?

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! my bow
I had forgot; I must not lose that treasure.

[PHILOCTETES *steps towards his Grotto, and brings out his Bow and Arrows.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Are these the famous arrows then?

PHILOCTETES.

They are.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And may I be permitted to behold,
To touch, to pay my adoration to them?

PHILOCTETES.

In these, my son, in ev'ry thing that's mine
Thou hast a right.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But if it be a crime,
I wou'd not; otherwise——

PHILOCTETES.

O! thou art full
Of piety; in thee it is no crime;
In thee, my friend, by whom alone I look
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun;
By whom I live; who giv'st me to return
To my dear father, to my friends, my country.
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more
I rise to triumph o'er them by thy aid;
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,
And boast that virtue which on thee alone
Bestow'd such honour; virtue made them mine;
I can deny thee nothing: he, whose heart
Is grateful, can alone deserve the name
Of friend, to ev'ry treasure far superior.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Go in.

PHILOCTETES.

Come with me; for my painful wound
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.

[*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Since proud Ixion, doom'd to feel
The tortures of th' eternal wheel,
Bound by the hand of angry Jove,
Receiv'd the due rewards of impious love;

Since proud Ixion, &c. The story of Ixion, here alluded to, is generally known; to the few who are unacquainted with it, it may be sufficient to observe, that Ixion was in love with Juno; and for boasting of that success in his amour, which he never met with, was thrown by Jupiter into hell, where, being placed on a wheel encompassed with serpents, he was turned round without ceasing.

This song of the Chorus, agreeably to the precepts of Horace, arises immediately from the subject, being a pathetic lamentation over Philoctetes; whose distresses are painted in the warmest colours, and described in all the elegance of antient simplicity.

Ne'er was distress so deep or woe so great
As on the wretched Philoctetes wait;
Who ever with the just and good
Guiltless of fraud and rapine stood,
And the fair paths of virtue still pursu'd;
Alone on this inhospitable shore,
Where waves for ever beat, and tempests roar;
How cou'd he e'er or hope or comfort know,
Or painful life support beneath such weight of woe!

ANTISTROPHE.

Expos'd to the inclement skies,
Deserted and forlorn he lies,
No friend or fellow-mourner there,
To soothe his sorrows, and divide his care;
Or seek the healing plant of pow'r to 'swage
His aching wound, and mitigate its rage;
But if perchance, awhile releas'd
From tort'ring pain, he sinks to rest,
Awaken'd soon, and by sharp hunger prest,
Compell'd to wander forth in search of food,
He crawls in anguish to the neighb'ring wood;
E'en as the tott'ring infant in despair,
Who mourns an absent mother's kind supporting care.

STROPHE II.

The teeming earth, who mortals still supplies
With ev'ry good, to him her seed denies;
A stranger to the joy that flows
From the kind aid which man on man bestows;
Nor food, alas! to him was giv'n,
Save when his arrows pierc'd the birds of heav'n;
Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bowl,
For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul;
But glad was he his eager thirst to slake
In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

ANTISTROPHE II.

But now, behold the joyful captive freed;
A fairer fate, and brighter days succeed:

For he at last hath found a friend
Of noblest race, to save and to defend,
To guide him with protecting hand,
And safe restore him to his native land;
On Sperchius' flow'ry banks to join the throng
Of Melian nymphs, and lead the choral song
On Œta's top, which saw Alcides rise,
And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

COME, Philoctetes; why thus silent? wherefore
This sudden terror on thee?

PHILOCTETES.

Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Whence is it?

PHILOCTETES.

Nothing; my son, go on.

Hath found a friend, &c. Brumoy observes on this passage, that the Chorus, being strongly attached to the interest of their master Neoptolemus, are but the echoes of his expressions, and though they could not therefore be ignorant of his design to carry Philoctetes to Troy, instead of his native country, they here mention the latter as his real intention, which they must be supposed to do from the fear of being overheard by Philoctetes, whose cave was close to them.

On Sperchius' banks. Sperchius was a river in Thessaly.

Melian nymphs. Melos was an island near Candy, reckoned among the Cyclades, and now called Milo.

Nothing, my son. The pains which Philoctetes felt from his wound are described as periodical, returning at certain seasons, and attended with violent agonies and convulsions, which generally terminated in a profuse discharge of matter; the pain then ceasing, the fatigue occasioned by it brought on a gentle slumber which relieved him. Philoc-

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Is it thy wound
That pains thee thus?

PHILOCTETES.

No; I am better now,
Oh! gods!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why dost thou call thus on the gods?

PHILOCTETES.

To smile propitious, and preserve us——Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou art in mis'ry. Tell me; wilt thou not?
What is it?

PHILOCTETES.

O! my son, I can no longer
Conceal it from thee. O! I die, I perish;
By the great gods let me implore thee, now
This moment, if thou hast a sword, O! strike,
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What can this mean, that unexpected thus
It shou'd torment thee?

PHILOCTETES.

Know you not, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What is the cause?

PHILOCTETES.

Can you not guess it?

tetes, feeling the symptoms of his distemper approaching, endeavours as much as possible to conceal his anguish, being apprehensive that his cries and groans might induce Neoptolemus, in spite of his promise, to leave him behind; he makes slight of it therefore, till quite overpowered by continual torture, he acknowledges himself at last unable to stir. This circumstance, we may observe, is artfully thrown in by the poet, to stop the effect of Ulysses's stratagem, which was just on the point of execution, and which, if it succeeded, must of course have put an end to the drama; this accident intervening gives a new turn to the whole, serves to introduce the remorse and repentance of Neoptolemus, gives Ulysses an opportunity of appearing, and brings about the catastrophe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No.

PHILOCTETES.

Nor I.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

That's stranger still.

PHILOCTETES.

My son, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

This new attack is terrible indeed!

PHILOCTETES.

'Tis inexpressible! have pity on me!

NEOPTOLEMUS

What shall I do?

PHILOCTETES.

Do not be terrified,
And leave me: its returns are regular,
And like the trav'ller, when its appetite
Is satisfied, it will depart. Oh! oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou art oppress'd with ills on ev'ry side.
Give me thy hand; come, wilt thou lean upon me?

PHILOCTETES.

No; but these arrows, take, preserve 'em for me
A little while, till I grow better: sleep
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease.
Let me be quiet; if mean time, our foes
Surprize thee, let nor force nor artifice
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust
I have reposed in thee; that were ruin
To thee, and to thy friend.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be not afraid,
No hands but mine shall touch them; give them to me.

PHILOCTETES.

Receive them, son; and let it be thy pray'r

They bring not woes on thee, as they have done
To me, and to Alcides.

[*Gives him the Bow and Arrows.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

May the gods
Forbid it ever; may they guide our course
And speed our prosp'rous sails!

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! my son,
I fear thy vows are vain; behold my blood
Flows from the wound; O! how it pains me! now,
It comes, it hastens; do not, do not leave me;
O! that Ulysses felt this racking torture,
E'en to his inmost soul! again it comes,
O! Agamemnon, Menelaus, why
Shou'd not you bear these pangs as I have done?
O! death, where art thou, death! so often call'd,
Wilt thou not listen? wilt thou never come?
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my gen'rous friend,
Do me the same kind office which I did
For my Alcides; these are thy reward;
He gave them to me, thou alone deserv'st
The great inheritance. What says my friend?
What says my dear preserver? O! where art thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I mourn thy hapless fate.

PHILOCTETES.

Be of good cheer,
Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon;
I only beg thee not to leave me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Depend on't, I will stay.

The Lemnian fire. Alluding, most probably, to the generally received opinion, that the forges of Vulcan were in the island of Lemnos.

The same kind office: Philoctetes had attended his friend Hercules in his last moments, and set fire to the funeral pile, when he expired on the top of mount Œta.

PHILOCTETES.

Wilt thou indeed?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Trust me, I will.

PHILOCTETES.

I need not bind thee to it
By oath.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O! no; 'twere impious to forsake thee.

PHILOCTETES.

Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I do.

PHILOCTETES.

Thither, O! thither lead. [*Pointing up to Heaven.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What say'st thou? where?

PHILOCTETES.

Above.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What, lost again? why look'st thou thus
On that bright circle?

PHILOCTETES.

Let me, let me go.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*lays hold of him.*)

Where would'st thou go?

PHILOCTETES.

Loose me.

Give me thy hand. Amongst the Greeks, in all compacts and agreements, it was usual to take each other by the right hand, that being the manner of plighting faith; this was always considered by men of character as equally binding with the most solemn oath; Philoctetes therefore desires no other assurance of the sincerity of his friend. It is perhaps needless here to remark, that this custom has been adopted by the moderns, and is practised in almost every nation to this day, though it does not amongst us carry so much weight with it, being seldom made use of in matters of great importance.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will not.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh!

You'll kill me, if you do not.

NEOPTOLEMUS *(lets him go,)*

There, then; now

Is thy mind better?

PHILOCTETES.

O! receive me, earth;

Receive a dying man; here must I lie;

For O! my pain's so great I cannot rise.

[PHILOCTETES *sinks down on the Earth near the Entrance of the Cave.*

SCENE II.

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Sleep hath o'erta'en him, see his head is lain

On the cold earth; the balmy sweat thick drops

From ev'ry limb, and from the broken vein

Flows the warm blood; let us indulge his slumbers.

CHORUS.

(INVOCATION TO SLEEP.)

Sleep, thou patron of mankind,

Great physician of the mind,

Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know,

Sweetest balm of ev'ry woe,

Mildest sov'reign, hear us now;

Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow;

Sleep, thou patron, &c. Philoctetes, quite faint from excess of pain, lays himself down upon the earth, and sinks into a short slumber; the Chorus, with great propriety, fill up the pause of action by an Invocation to Sleep. In the original, this speech of the Chorus, and the next, are in Strophe, Antistrophe, and Epode; the reason why I have thrown only the first part into rhyme must be obvious to the judicious reader.

His eyes in gentle slumbers close,
And continue his repose;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow,
Great physician, hear us now.

And now, my son, what best may suit thy purpose
Consider well, and how we are to act;
What more can we expect? the time is come;
For better far is opportunity
Seiz'd at the lucky hour than all the counsels
Which wisdom dictates or which craft inspires.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He hears us not; but easy as it is
To gain the prize, it wou'd avail us nothing
Were he not with us? Phœbus hath reserv'd
For him alone the crown of victory;
But thus to boast of what we cou'd not do,
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

CHORUS.

The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son;
But what thou say'st, speak soft, for well thou know'st
The sick man's sleep is short; he may awake
And hear us, therefore let us hide our purpose;
If then thou think'st as he does, thou know'st whom,
This is the hour; at such a time, my son,
The wisest err; but mark me, the wind's fair,
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help;
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,
He is as one among the dead; e'en now
We'll take him with us; 'twere an easy task.
Leave it to me, my son; there is no danger.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No more; his eyes are open; see, he moves.

Thou know'st whom. The Chorus means Ulysses, but is afraid to mention his name, lest Philoctetes should awake and hear it, which would at once discover the plot against him.

SCENE III.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES, *(awaking.)*

O! fair returning light! beyond my hope;
You too, my kind preservers! O! my son,
I cou'd not think thou would'st have stay'd so long
In kind compassion to thy friend; alas!
Th' Atridæ never wou'd have acted thus;
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth,
And therefore little did my wretchedness,
Nor from my wounds the noisome stench deter
Thy gen'rous heart. I have a little respite;
Help me, my son; I'll try to rise; this weakness
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I little thought to find thee thus restor'd.
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,
And hear thee speak; the marks of death were on thee;
Raise thyself up; thy friends here, if thou wilt,
Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burthen to them
If we request it.

PHILOCTETES.

No; thy hand alone;
I will not trouble them; 'twill be enough
If they can bear with me and my distemper,
When we embark.

O! fair, &c. Mr. Brumoy, here begins his fourth act, which is certainly very absurd, as there is not the least pause of action, or vacancy of scene, Philoctetes awaking immediately after the last speech of the Chorus, who observed his eyes opening; besides that, the third act is thus rendered most preposterously short; though the French critic remarks, that it is, notwithstanding, a complete act; "suivant l' idée des Grecs," "according to the idea of the Greeks." One may venture however to pronounce, that if the Greeks had divided their tragedies into acts, they would have done it with more judgement.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Well, be it so, but rise.

PHILOCTETES, *(rising.)*

O never fear; I'll rise as well as ever. [*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How shall I act?

PHILOCTETES.

What says my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas!

I know not what to say; my doubtful mind ——

PHILOCTETES.

Talk'd you of doubts? you did not surely.

I'll rise as well as ever. The end of the third act (if an act there must be) may, I think, with great propriety be placed here; as Philoctetes may be supposed to creep into his cave to look for the plant which he mentioned, and Neoptolemus to go in with him, so that the stage would be left void. This act, even thus extended, is not half so long as the preceding; the division, however, is better than Brumoy's.

How shall I act? Neoptolemus, who, as I before observed, is described to us as of an honest and ingenuous disposition, being deeply affected by the distress and anguish of Philoctetes, softened at the same time by the confidence which this unhappy man had reposed in him, and reflecting on the solemn contract he had just made, is struck with horror and remorse at the thought of such treachery and baseness; he advances in a pensive posture, and speaks to himself without regarding Philoctetes, who is at a loss to comprehend him, till at last he opens his heart and confesses the design; this gives a new and sudden turn to the plot, and prepares the necessary appearance of Ulysses. Thus does every circumstance in this excellent tragedy arise naturally from that which goes before it, and all the various parts of the edifice contribute to the strength, symmetry, and beauty of the whole.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Aye,
That's my misfortune.

PHILOCTETES.

Is then my distress
The cause at last you will not take me with you?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

All is distress and mis'ry, when we act
Against our nature, and consent to ill.

PHILOCTETES.

But sure to help a good man in misfortunes
Is not against thy nature.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Men will call me
A villain; that distracts me.

PHILOCTETES.

Not for this,
For what thou mean'st to do thou may'st deserve it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall I do? direct me, Jove! — To hide
What I shou'd speak, and tell a base untruth,
Were double guilt.

PHILOCTETES.

He purposes at last,
I fear it much, to leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Leave thee! No.
But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,
There I'm distress'd.

PHILOCTETES.

I understand thee not;
What means my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I can no longer hide
The dreadful secret from thee; thou art going
To Troy, e'en to the Greeks, to the Atridæ.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! what say'st thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Do not weep, but hear me.

PHILOCTETES.

What must I hear? what wilt thou do with me?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

First set thee free; then carry thee, my friend,
To conquer Troy.

PHILOCTETES.

Is this indeed thy purpose?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

This am I bound to do.

PHILOCTETES.

Then am I lost,
Undone, betray'd; canst thou, my friend, do this?
Give me my arms again.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

It cannot be.
I must obey the pow'rs who sent me hither;
Justice enjoins; the common cause demands it.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou worst of men, thou vile artificer
Of fraud most infamous, what hast thou done?
How have I been deceiv'd? dost thou not blush
To look upon me, to behold me thus
Beneath thy feet imploring? base betrayer!
To rob me of my bow, the means of life,
The only means; give 'em, restore 'em to me;
Do not take all: alas! he hears me not,

Thou worst of men. The original is ω πυρ συ, which, according to the Scholiast, was meant for a pun on the word Πυῤῥος, Pyrrhus, the first and proper name of Neoptolemus. Brumoy translates it, 'O! rage digne 'de ton nom.' I thought so poor a quibble might as well be omitted.

He hears me not. Neoptolemus repenting of his perfidy and lost in thought, is debating within himself, whether he shall restore the arrows to Philoctetes; he walks about therefore in great agitation of mind, and

Nor deigns to speak, but casts an angry look
That says, I never shall be free again.
O! mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!
To you I speak, to you alone I now
Must breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear
My sad complaints, and I will tell you all
That I have suffer'd from Achilles' son;
Who, bound by solemn oath to bear me hence
To my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.
The perjur'd wretch first gave his plighted hand,
Then stole the sacred arrows of my friend,
The son of Jove, the great Alcides; those
He means to shew the Greeks, to snatch me hence,
And boast his prize; as if poor Philoctetes,
This empty shade, were worthy of his arm;
Had I been what I was, he ne'er had thus
Subdu'd me, and e'en now to fraud alone
He owes the conquest; I have been betray'd.
Give me my arms again, and be thyself
Once more; O! speak; thou wilt not; then I'm lost.
O! my poor hut! again I come to thee,
Naked and destitute of food, once more
Receive me, here to die; for now, no longer
Shall my swift arrow reach the flying prey,
Or on the mountains pierce the wand'ring herd;
I shall myself afford a banquet now
To those I us'd to feed on; they the hunters,
And I their easy prey; so shall the blood
Which I so oft have shed be paid by mine;
And all this too from him whom once I deem'd
Stranger to fraud, nor capable of ill;
And yet I will not curse thee, till I know
Whether thou still retain'st thy horrid purpose,

gives no attention to what is said to him; this whole scene is full of action, and the variety of passions, expressed in the countenance and gesture of both, must have had a fine effect in the representation.

Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,
Destruction wait thee.

CHORUS.

We attend your pleasure,
My royal lord, we must be gone; determine
To leave, or take him with us.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

His distress
Doth move me much; trust me, I long have felt
Compassion for him.

PHILOCTETES.

O! then by the gods
Pity me now, my son, nor let mankind
Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas!
What shall I do? wou'd I were still at Scyros!
For I am most unhappy.

PHILOCTETES.

O! my son,
Thou art not base by nature, but misguided
By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee;
Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it;
Restore my arms, and leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Speak, my friends,
What's to be done?

We attend your pleasure. Brumoy sends off the Chorus towards the sea-shore immediately after the words, 'When we embark,' p. 173, and brings them back again in this place, as sent by Ulysses to know the reason of Neoptolemus's delay. This departure and return of the Chorus, which is a mere conjecture of Brumoy's, is, I think, unnecessary; besides that it is not agreeable to the conduct generally observed by Sophocles, whose Chorus's always continue on the stage, unless on some very important occasion.

Speak, my friends. Neoptolemus, already resolved to atone for his crime, by restoring the arrows, applies to the Chorus for their opinion,

SCENE II.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS, ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

Ha! dost thou hesitate?
Traitor! be gone. Give me the arms.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah me!
Ulysses here?

ULYSSES.

Aye! 'tis Ulysses' self
That stands before thee.

PHILOCTETES.

Then I'm lost, betray'd;
This was the cruel spoiler.

ULYSSES.

Doubt it not.
'Twas I; I do confess it.

PHILOCTETES *(to* NEOPTOLEMUS.*)*

O! my son,
Give me them back.

ULYSSES.

It must not be; with them
Thyself must go; or we shall drag thee hence.

PHILOCTETES.

And will they force me? O! thou daring villain!

ULYSSES.

They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

which he knew would be in favour of Philoctetes. Ulysses surprised at their unexpected delay, and impatient to be gone, leaves his ship, and, having overheard Neoptolemus, enters at this important juncture. His sudden intrusion and haughty behaviour but serve to confirm Neoptolemus in his resolution. Nothing can be better imagined or conducted than the plan of this excellent drama.

PHILOCTETES.

Wilt thou, O Lemnos! wilt thou, mighty Vulcan!
With thy all-conqu'ring fire, permit me thus
To be torn from thee?

ULYSSES.

Know, great Jove himself
Doth here preside; he hath decreed thy fate,
I but perform his will.

PHILOCTETES.

Detested wretch,
Mak'st thou the gods a cover for thy crime?
Do they teach falsehood?

ULYSSES.

No, they taught me truth,
And therefore, hence; that way thy journey lies.
[*Pointing to the Sea.*

PHILOCTETES.

It doth not.

ULYSSES.

But, I say, it must be so.

PHILOCTETES.

And Philoctetes then was born a slave!
I did not know it.

ULYSSES.

No; I mean to place thee
E'en with the noblest, e'en with those by whom
Proud Troy must perish.

PHILOCTETES.

Never will I go,
Befall what may, whilst this deep cave is open
To bury all my sorrows.

ULYSSES.

What wou'd'st do?

PHILOCTETES.

Here throw me down, dash out my desp'rate brains
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

ULYSSES (*to the* CHORUS.)

Seize, and prevent him. [*They seize him.*

PHILOCTETES.

Manacled! O! hands,
How helpless are you now! those arms, which once
Protected, thus torn from you! [*To* ULYSSES.
Thou abandon'd,
Thou shameless wretch! from whom nor truth nor justice,
Nought that becomes the gen'rous mind, can flow,
How hast thou us'd me! how betray'd! suborn'd
This stranger, this poor youth, who worthier far
To be my friend than thine, was only here
Thy instrument; he knew not what he did,
And now, thou see'st, repents him of the crime
Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.
But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess
Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art,
Unwilling as he was, instructed him,
And made him soon a master in deceit.
I am thy pris'ner now; e'en now thou mean'st
To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore
Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile,
Deserted, friendless, and tho' living, dead
To all mankind: perish the vile betrayer!
O! I have curst thee often, but the gods
Will never hear the pray'rs of Philoctetes.
Life and its joys are thine; whilst I unhappy
Am but the scorn of thee, and the Atridæ,
Thy haughty masters; fraud and force compell'd thee,
Or thou had'st never sail'd with them to Troy.

From its dark recess, &c. The Greek is 'δια μυχον βλεπυσ', 'per latebras 'prospiciens;' the expression is remarkable, and the translation therefore almost literal.

Fraud and force compell'd thee. Ulysses, unwilling to go among the other chiefs to the seige of Troy, feigned himself mad; but being detected by Palamedes, was after all obliged to join them.

I lent my willing aid; with sev'n brave ships
I plough'd the main to serve 'em! in return
They cast me forth, disgrac'd me, left me here;
Thou say'st they did it; they impute the crime
To thee; and what will you do with me now?
And whither must I go? what end, what purpose,
Cou'd urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost
And dead already; wherefore, tell me, wherefore?
Am I not still the same detested burthen,
Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes
Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you
How can you make libations? That was once
Your vile pretence for inhumanity.
O! may you perish for the deed! The gods
Will grant it sure, if justice be their care,
And that it is, I know. You had not left
Your native soil to seek a wretch like me,
Had not some impulse from the pow'rs above
Spite of yourselves, ordain'd it: O! my country,
And you, O! gods, who look upon this deed,
Punish, in pity to me, punish all
The guilty band! could I behold them perish,
My wounds were nothing; that wou'd heal them all.

CHORUS, (*to* ULYSSES.)

Observe, my lord, what bitterness of soul
His words express; he bends not to misfortune,
But seems to brave it.

ULYSSES.

I cou'd answer him,
Were this a time for words; but now, no more
Than this — I act as best befits our purpose.
Where virtue, truth, and justice are requir'd,
Ulysses yields to none; I was not born
To be o'ercome, and yet submit to thee.

Am I not still. This is mentioned in the first scene as the reason assigned for exposing Philoctetes on the island; the sarcasm therefore is just and natural.

Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice;
We want thee not; Teucer can draw thy bow
As well as thou; myself, with equal strength
Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.
What cou'd thy presence do? let Lemnos keep thee.
Farewell! perhaps the honours, once design'd
For thee, may be reserv'd to grace Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest foe
Adorn'd with arms which I alone shou'd bear?

ULYSSES.

No more: I must be gone.

PHILOCTETES, *(to* NEOPTOLEMUS.*)*

Son of Achilles,
Thou wilt not leave me too? I must not lose
Thy converse, thy assistance.

ULYSSES, *to* (NEOPTOLEMUS.)

Look not on him;
Away, I charge thee; 'twou'd be fatal to us.

PHILOCTETES, *(to the* CHORUS.*)*

Will you forsake me, friends, dwells no compassion
Within your breasts for me?

CHORUS, *(pointing to* NEOPTOLEMUS.*)*

He is our master,
We speak and act but as his will directs.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know he will upbraid me for this weakness,
But 'tis my nature, and I must consent,
Since Philoctetes asks it; stay you with him,
Till to the gods our pious pray'rs we offer,
And all things are prepar'd for our departure;
Perhaps, mean time, to better thoughts his mind
May turn relenting; we must go: remember
When we shall call you, follow instantly.

[*Exit with* ULYSESS.

Teucer can draw thy bow. Teucer was accounted one of the best archers in the Grecian army, though Menelaus, we may remember, reproaches him for it. See note in Ajax, p. 49.

SCENE III.

PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

O! my poor hut! and is it then decreed
Again I come to thee to part no more,
To end my wretched days in this sad cave,
The scene of all my woes? for whither now
Can I betake me? who will feed, support,
Or cherish Philoctetes? not a hope
Remains for me. O! that th' impetuous storms
Wou'd bear me with them to some distant clime!
For I must perish here.

CHORUS.

Unhappy man!
Thou hast provok'd thy fate; thyself alone
Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good,
Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfortune.

PHILOCTETES.

Wretch that I am, to perish here alone!
O! I shall see the face of man no more,
Nor shall my arrows pierce their winged prey,
And bring me sustenance! such vile delusions
Us'd to betray me! O! that pains, like those
I feel, might reach the author of my woes!

CHORUS.

The gods decreed it; we are not to blame;
Heap not thy curses therefore on the guiltless,
But take our friendship.

O my poor hut, &c. From this place, to the words 'O! ye have 'brought back once more, &c.' the Greek is all Strophe and Antistrophe, set to music, and sung alternately by Philoctetes and the Chorus.

Th' impetuous storm, &c. The Greek is πτωκαδες or πτωχαδες, which the Scholiasts interpret, harpies. Ratallerus and Brumoy, whom I have here followed, render it, storms, which is the most natural and obvious sense.

The author of my woes. Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES *(pointing to the Sea-shore.)*

I behold him there;
E'en now I see him laughing me to scorn
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these
Had ever borne. O! my dear glorious treasure!
Hadst thou a mind to feel th' indignity,
How would'st thou grieve to change thy noble master,
The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses!

CHORUS.

Justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,
Nor from his lips, reproach and bitterness
Invidious flow; Ulysses, by the voice
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

PHILOCTETES.

Hear me, ye wing'd inhabitants of air,
And you, who on these mountains love to feed,
My savage prey, whom once I cou'd pursue;
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly
This hollow rock, I cannot hurt you now;
You need not dread to enter here; alas!
You now may come, and in your turn regale
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more.
Where can I hope for food? or who can breathe
This vital air, when life-preserving earth
No longer will assist him?

CHORUS.

By the gods
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard
Our master, and thy friend, come to him now,
Whilst thou may'st 'scape this sad calamity;
Who but thyself wou'd choose to be unhappy
That cou'd prevent it?

Life-perserving earth. The Greek is remarkably soft and elegant, Βιοδωρος αια·

PHILOCTETES.

O! you have brought back
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs;
Why, why my friends, wou'd you afflict me thus?

CHORUS.

Afflict thee, how?

PHILOCTETES.

Think you I'll e'er return
To hateful Troy?

CHORUS.

We wou'd advise thee to it.

PHILOCTETES.

I'll hear no more. Go, leave me.

CHORUS.

That we shall
Most gladly; to the ships, my friends, away; [*Going*
Obey your orders.

PHILOCTETES *(stops them.)*

By protecting Jove,
Who hears the suppliant's pray'r, do not forsake me.

CHORUS *(returning.)*

Be calm then.

PHILOCTETES.

O! my friends! will you then stay?
Do, by the gods I beg you.

CHORUS.

Why that groan?

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! I die! my wound, my wound! hereafter
What can I do? you will not leave me; hear——

CHORUS.

What canst thou say we do not know already?

PHILOCTETES.

O'erwhelm'd by such a storm of griefs as I am,

My wound. The original is, "O! my foot, my foot!" which the reader may substitute if he thinks proper.

You shou'd not thus resent a madman's frenzy.

CHORUS.

Comply then and be happy.

PHILOCTETES.

Never, never;
Be sure of that; tho' thunder-bearing Jove
Shou'd with his lightnings blast me, wou'd I go;
No; let Troy perish, perish all the host
Who sent me here to die; but, O! my friends,
Grant me this last request.

CHORUS.

What is it? speak.

PHILOCTETES.

A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.

CHORUS.

What would'st thou do?

PHILOCTETES.

I'd hack off ev'ry limb.
Death, my soul longs for death.

CHORUS.

But wherefore is it?

PHILOCTETES.

I'll seek my father.

CHORUS.

Whither?

PHILOCTETES.

In the tomb;
There he must be. O! Scyros, O! my country,
How cou'd I bear to see thee as I am!
I who had left thy sacred shores to aid
The hateful sons of Greece! O! misery!

[*Goes into the Cave.*

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

ERE now we shou'd have ta'en thee to our ships,
But that advancing this way I behold
Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son.

ULYSSES.

Why this return? wherefore this haste?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I come
To purge me of my crimes?

ULYSSES.

Indeed! what crimes?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

My blind obedience to the Grecian host,
And to thy counsels.

ULYSSES.

Hast thou practis'd aught
Base, or unworthy of thee?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Yes; by art
And vile deceit betray'd th' unhappy.

Ere now we shou'd, &c. The same impropriety, which struck us on the opening of the fourth act, recurs with equal force at the beginning of this. The scene is not void, and consequently no such division can take place. That of Brumoy is still more absurd, which takes in this speech to the fourth act, as if it were possible that the Chorus should perceive their masters Ulysses and Neoptolemus approaching, and immediately run off the stage: it is surely much better to make them go in with Philoctetes, and come out again speaking to him still remaining in the cave.

Why this return, &c. Neoptolemus advances in haste towards the cave of Philoctetes; Ulysses, apprehensive of his design, follows and expostulates with him.

ULYSSES.

Whom?

Alas! what mean you?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nothing. But the son

Of Pæan ——

ULYSSES.

Ha! what would'st thou do? my heart

Misgives me. [*aside.*

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have ta'en his arms, and now ——

ULYSSES.

Thou would'st restore them! speak! is that thy purpose?

Almighty Jove!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Unjustly shou'd I keep

Another's right?

ULYSSES.

Now, by the gods, thou mean'st

To mock me; dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If to speak truth

Be mockery.

ULYSSES.

And does Achilles' son

Say this to me?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why force me to repeat

My words so often to thee?

ULYSSES.

Once to hear them

Is once indeed too much.

Thou would'st restore them. The resolution of Neoptolemus to restore the arrows to Philoctetes gives a new turn to the plot, disconcerts the measures of Ulysses, and awakens the attention of the spectator, who expects with eagerness the consequences of it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Doubt then no more,
For I have told thee all.

ULYSSES.

There are, remember,
There are, who may prevent thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Who shall dare
To thwart my purpose?

ULYSSES.

All the Grecian host,
And with them, I.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wise as thou art, Ulysses,
Thou talk'st most idly.

ULYSSES.

Wisdom is not thine
Either in word or deed.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Know, to be just
Is better far than to be wise.

ULYSSES.

But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthoris'd,
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,
And to my counsels?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.

ULYSSES.

Dost thou not fear the pow'r of Greece?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I fear
Nor Greece, nor thee, when I am doing right.

ULYSSES.

'Tis not with Troy then we contend, but thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know not that.

ULYSSES.

See'st thou this hand? behold,
It grasps my sword.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Mine is alike prepar'd,
Nor seeks delay.

ULYSSES.

But I will let thee go;
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.

[*Exit* ULYSSES.

SCENE II.

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

'Twas well determin'd; always be as wise
As now thou art, and thou may'st live in safety.

[*approaching towards the Cave.*

Ho! son of Pæan! Philoctetes, leave
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth.

PHILOCTETES *(from the Cave.)*

What noise was that? who calls on Philoctetes?

[*he comes out.*

I will let thee go. Brumoy, whose notions of honour are perhaps a little too modern on the occasion, is shocked at this appearance of cowardice in Ulysses, who after thus exasperating Neoptolemus, instead of resenting his cavalier treatment, very prudently retires, with a threat to tell the Grecians of his ill behaviour. The conduct of Sophocles in this particular is, notwithstanding, unexceptionable; for, however unavoidable a duel might have been on the French stage in such a circumstance, the antients did not see the necessity of it; their heroes, as we find in Homer, bore a great deal of bad language from each other without drawing their swords: It would therefore have been highly inconsistent with the character of the prudent Ulysses to have quarrelled and fought with his friend, and thus put an end at once to the whole scheme of his expedition.

SCENE III.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas! what wou'd you, strangers? are you come
To heap fresh mis'ries on me?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be of comfort,
And hear the tidings which I bring.

PHILOCTETES.

I dare not;
Thy flatt'ring tongue already hath betray'd me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And is there then no room for penitence?

PHILOCTETES.

Such were thy words, when, seemingly sincere,
Yet meaning ill, thou stol'st my arms away.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But now it is not so. I only came
To know if thou art resolute to stay,
Or sail with us.

PHILOCTETES.

No more of that; 'tis vain
And useless all.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Art thou then fix'd?

PHILOCTETES.

I am;
It is impossible to say how firmly.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I thought I cou'd have mov'd thee, but I've done.

PHILOCTETES.

'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been vain;
For never cou'd my soul esteem the man
Who robb'd me of my dearest, best possession,
And now wou'd have me listen to his counsels;

Unworthy offspring of the best of men!
Perish th' Atridæ! perish first Ulysses!
Perish thyself!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Withhold thy imprecations,
And take thy arrows back.

PHILOCTETES.

A second time
Would'st thou deceive me?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By th' almighty pow'r
Of sacred Jove I swear.

PHILOCTETES.

O! joyful sound!
If thou say'st truly.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Let my actions speak.
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.

[*Gives him the Arrows.*

SCENE IV.

ULYSSES, PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

ULYSSES.

Witness ye gods, here, in the name of Greece,
And the Atridæ, I forbid it.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha!
What voice is that? Ulysses?

ULYSSES.

Aye, 'tis I,
I who perforce will carry thee to Troy
Spite of Achilles' son.

PHILOCTETES,
(Raising his Arm as intending to throw an Arrow at ULYSSES.*)*

Not if I aim
This shaft aright.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now by the gods I beg thee
Stop thy rash hand. [*laying hold of him.*

PHILOCTETES.

Let go my arm.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will not.

PHILOCTETES.

Shall I not slay my enemy?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O! no;
'Twou'd cast dishonour on us both.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou know'st,
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know it; but remember, I restor'd
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause

Not if I aim, &c. Ulysses, strongly opposing and protesting against the restitution of the arrows, Philoctetes no sooner regains them, than, warm with resentment, he aims an arrow at his breast, but is withheld by Neoptolemus. Mr. de Fenelon, in his Telemaque, has varied a little from Sophocles in this particular. He supposes Ulysses to have made a sign to Neoptolemus to restore the arrows; and that Philoctetes notwithstanding, in the heat of passion, drew the bow against his enemy, but was stopt by Neoptolemus. 'I was ashamed of myself, says Philoctetes (See Tel. b. 15.) for thus using my arrows against him who had restored them to me, and at the same time could not bear the thought of being indebted for any thing to a man whom I so abhored.' This, as Brumoy judiciously observes, is spirited, but not agreeable to the conduct of Sophocles; as the propriety of character is destroyed by making Ulysses consent to the restoration of the arrows, and likewise by the ungenerous behaviour of Philoctetes in endeavouring to kill his benefactor.

For rage, or for complaint against thy friend.

PHILOCTETES.

I own thy goodness; thou hast shewn thyself
Worthy thy birth, no son of Sisyphus,
But of Achilles, who on earth preserv'd
A fame unspotted, and amongst the dead
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise,
And for my own; but listen to my words,
And mark me well; misfortunes, which the gods
Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear,
But when oppress'd by voluntary woes
They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not
Our pity or our pardon; such art thou;
Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,
Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,
And treats him like a foe; but I will speak,
Jove be my witness! therefore hear my words,
And grave them in thy heart; the dire disease
Thou long hast suffer'd is from angry heav'n,
Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach
To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa's shore
Watch'd o'er the sacred treasures; know beside,
That whilst the sun in yonder east shall rise,
Or in the west decline, distemper'd still
Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy
Thy willing mind transport thee; there the sons
Of Æsculapius shall restore thee, there
By my assistance shalt thou conquer Troy;
I know it well; for that prophetic sage,
The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold
It shou'd be so; proud Troy (he added then)

No son of Sisyphus. See note, p. 153. The injuries he had received from Ulysses are always uppermost in his thoughts, and he takes every opportunity of shewing his resentment of them.

On Chrysa's shore. See the first note, p. 135.

'This very year must fall, if not, my life
'Shall answer for the falsehood:' therefore yield;
Thus to be deem'd the first of Grecians, thus
By Pæan's fav'rite sons to be restor'd,
And thus mark'd out the conqueror of Troy,
Is sure distinguish'd happiness.

PHILOCTETES.

O! life
Detested, why wilt thou still keep me here,
Why not dismiss me to the tomb? alas!
What can I do? how can I disbelieve
My gen'rous friend? I must consent, and yet
Can I do this, and look upon the sun?
Can I behold my friends, will they forgive,
Will they associate with me after this?
And you, ye heav'nly orbs that roll around me,
How will ye bear to see me link'd with those
Who have destroy'd me, e'en the sons of Atreus,
E'en with Ulysses, source of all my woes?
My suff'rings past I cou'd forget, but O!
I dread the woes to come; for well I know
When once the mind's corrupted, it brings forth
Unnumber'd crimes, and ills to ills succeed.
It moves my wonder much, that thou, my friend,
Should'st thus advise me, whom it ill becomes
To think of Troy; I rather had believ'd
Thou would'st have sent me far, far off from those
Who have defrauded thee of thy just right,
And gave thy arms away: are these the men
Whom thou would'st serve? whom thou would'st thus
compel me

How can I disbelieve, &c. Philoctetes, moved by the generosity of Neoptolemus in restoring the arrows, is almost persuaded to lay aside his resentment and sail for Troy; but at the same time cannot bear the thought of joining Ulysses and the Atridæ; this doubt and uncertainty causes a new situation in the drama, which keeps up the attention of the audience. One cannot help observing with what a variety of interesting circumstances Sophocles has contrived to embellish a subject so simple as to appear at first sight incapable of admitting any.

To save and to defend? it must not be.
Remember, O! my son, the solemn oath
Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil;
Do this, my friend, remain thyself at Scyros,
And leave these wretches to be wretched still.
Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me,
And from my father; nor by succour giv'n
To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou say'st most truly: yet confide in heav'n,
Trust to thy friend, and leave this hated place.

PHILOCTETES.

Leave it? for whom? for Troy and the Atridæ?
These wounds forbid it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

They shall all be heal'd,
Where I will carry thee.

PHILOCTETES.

An idle tale
Thou tell'st me, surely, dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I speak
What best may serve us both.

PHILOCTETES.

But, speaking thus,
Dost thou not fear th' offended gods?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why fear them?
Can I offend the gods by doing good?

PHILOCTETES.

What good? to whom? to me or to th' Atridæ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I am thy friend, and therefore wou'd persuade thee.

PHILOCTETES.

And therefore give me to my foes.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas!

Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul
To rage and bitterness.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou would'st destroy me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou know'st me not.

PHILOCTETES.

I know th' Atridæ well,
Who left me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

They did; yet they perhaps,
E'en they, O! Philoctetes, may preserve thee.

PHILOCTETES.

I never will to Troy.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What's to be done?
Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit;
Live on in misery.

PHILOCTETES.

Then, let me suffer;
Suffer I must; but, O! perform thy promise;
Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home
Instant, my friend, nor ever call back Troy
To my remembrance; I have felt enough
From Troy already.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Let us go, prepare.

PHILOCTETES.

O! glorious sound!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Bear thyself up.

PHILOCTETES.

I will,
If possible.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But how shall I escape
The wrath of Greece?

PHILOCTETES.

O! think not of it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What
If they shou'd waste my kingdom?

PHILOCTETES.

I'll be there.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas! what canst thou do?

PHILOCTETES.

And with these arrows
Of my Alcides ——

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ha! what say'st thou?

PHILOCTETES.

Drive
Thy foes before me; not a Greek shall dare
Approach thy borders.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If thou wilt do this,
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away.

SCENE IV.

HERCULES, ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

HERCULES *(descends and speaks.)*

Stay, son of Pæan; lo! to thee 'tis giv'n
Once more to see and hear thy lov'd Alcides,

Stay, son of Pæan, &c. Hercules after a life spent in the laborious service of virtue, was admitted into heaven by his father Jupiter, and ranked among the gods. Agreeably to his character whilst upon earth, he leaves the regions of peace and happiness only to serve his country and his friend. To justify the poet, with regard to this appearance of a deity, it may not be improper here to observe, that Philoctetes is described as fierce and inexorable, with a mind soured by injuries, and a heart hardened by calamity: he is not to be softened by the art and subtlety

Who for thy sake hath left yon heav'nly mansions,
And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove;
To turn thee from the paths thou mean'st to tread,
And guide thy footsteps right; therefore attend.
Thou know'st what toils, what labours I endur'd,
Ere I by virtue gain'd immortal fame;
Thou too like me by toils must rise to glory;
Thou too, must suffer, ere thou canst be happy;
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,
Where health awaits thee; where, by virtue rais'd
To highest rank, and leader of the war,
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home,
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire
On Œta's top; the gifts which Greece bestows
Must thou reserve to grace my fun'ral pile,
And be a monument to after ages
Of these all-conqu'ring arms. —— Son of Achilles
[*turning to* NEOPTOLEMUS.
(For now to thee I speak) remember this,
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed;
Go then, and, like two lions in the field
Roaming for prey, guard ye each other well;
My Æsculapius will I send e'en now

of Ulysses, nor subdued by the honour and generosity of Neoptolemus; a change of will could not therefore take place without departing from that propriety of character which Sophocles always religiously observes. The descent of Hercules is, on this account, both necessary and beautiful; for though in some of the Greek tragedies, the interposition of the gods can perhaps hardly be justified, the severest critic will, I believe, here acknowledge the 'dignus vindice nodus' of Horace. To the manner of this appearance and the machinery made use of on the occasion we are left entire strangers; we have no lights from antiquity concerning the decorations of the theatre, and are only told in general, that they were made with the utmost splendor and magnificence: the character of Hercules during his short stay is sustained with great dignity; he says no more than what is absolutely necessary on the occasion, and then reascends.

To heal thy wounds; then go, and conquer Troy;
But when you lay the vanquish'd city waste,
Be careful that you venerate the gods;
For far above all other gifts doth Jove,
Th' almighty father, hold true piety;
Whether we live or die, that still survives
Beyond the reach of fate and is immortal.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Once more to let me hear that wish'd-for voice,
To see thee after so long time, was bliss
I cou'd not hope for. O! I will obey
Thy great commands most willingly.

PHILOCTETES.

And I.

HERCULES.

Delay not then; for, lo! a prosp'rous wind
Swells in thy sail; the time invites, adieu.

[HERCULES *reascends.*

SCENE V.

PHILOCTETES, ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

I will but pay my salutations here,
And instantly depart —— To thee, my cave,
Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell;
And you, ye nymphs, who on the wat'ry plains
Deign to reside, farewell; farewell the noise
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard
From the rough sea, which by the black winds driv'n

Be careful, &c. This is supposed by the commentators to convey a kind of prophetic censure of Neoptolemus, who after his return to Troy murdered the aged Priam, even at the altar of Hercæan Jove.

Whether we live or die, &c. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, "and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or "die, we are the Lord's." St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, c. xiv. v. 8.

O'erwhelm'd me shiv'ring; oft th' Hermæan mount
Echo'd my plaintive voice, by wintry storms
Afflicted, and return'd me groan for groan.
Now, ye fresh fountains, each Lycæan spring,
I leave you now; alas! I little thought
To leave you ever; and thou sea-girt isle,
Lemnos, farewell; permit me to depart
By thee unblam'd, and with a prosp'rous gale
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

CHORUS.

Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs
Our humble prayers prefer, that they wou'd all
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

Th' Hermæan mount. A mountain in Lemnos; though some are of opinion, that the word Hermæan is only an epithet generally appropriated to mountains, from Hermes or Mercury, the god of hills and groves.

Each Lycæan spring. Fountains sacred to Apollo Lycius.

ANTIGONE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CREON, KING OF THEBES.

EURYDICE, WIFE OF CREON.

HÆMON, SON OF CREON.

ANTIGONE, DAUGHTER OF ŒDIPUS.

ISMENE, SISTER OF ANTIGONE.

TIRESIAS, A PROPHET.

A MESSENGER, GUARD, SERVANT, AND ATTENDANTS.

CHORUS, COMPOSED OF ANTIENT MEN OF THEBES.

ANTIGONE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

ANTIGONE.

O! my dear sister, my best-belov'd Ismene,
Is there an evil, by the wrath of Jove
Reserv'd for Œdipus' unhappy race,
We have not felt already? sorrow and shame,
And bitterness and anguish, all that's sad,
All that's distressful hath been ours, and now

O! my dear sister, &c. Eteocles and Polynices, sons of the unfortunate Œdipus, having an equal claim to the kingdom of Thebes, had agreed to divide the power, and to reign year by year alternately; but Eteocles stepping first into the throne, and tasting the sweets of sovereignty, broke the contract, and maintained himself in the possession of his dominions. Polynices, in revenge, raised an army of Argians, and made an incursion on Thebes; a battle ensued, and after much slaughter on both sides, the brothers agreed to decide it by single combat; they fought, and were slain by each other. After the death of the brothers the kingdom of Thebes devolved to their uncle Creon, whose first act of supreme power was an edict forbidding all rites of sepulture to Polynices, as a traitor; and pronouncing instant death on any who should dare to bury him. Here the action of the tragedy commences, the subject of which is the piety of Antigone in opposition to the edict of Creon, with the distresses consequent upon it. The time and place are exactly marked out in the first scene, where Antigone calls her sister out of the palace into the adjoining area, to inform her of the decree, which had been issued out on the preceding day, and her resolutions concerning it.

This dreadful edict from the tyrant comes
To double our misfortunes; hast thou heard
What harsh commands he hath impos'd on all,
Or art thou still to know what future ills
Our foes have yet in store to make us wretched?

ISMENE.

Since that unhappy day, Antigone,
When by each other's hand our brothers fell,
And Greece dismiss'd her armies, I have heard
Nought that cou'd give or joy or grief to me.

ANTIGONE.

I thought thou wert a stranger to the tidings,
And therefore call'd thee forth, that here alone
I might impart them to thee.

ISMENE.

O! what are they?
For something dreadful labours in thy breast.

ANTIGONE.

Know then, from Creon, our indulgent lord,
Our hapless brothers met a different fate,
To honour one, and one to infamy
He hath consign'd; with fun'ral rites he grac'd

With fun'ral rites, &c. Of all the honours paid to the dead, the care of their funerals was looked upon by the antients as most necessary and indispensable; as to be deprived of sepulture, was accounted the the greatest misfortune, and the highest injury. No imprecation was therefore so terrible as that any person might ἀθαπτος πεσοιτεν χθονος, 'die destitute of burial:' it was not to be wondered at that they were thus solicitous about the interment of their dead; when they were strongly possessed with the opinion that the souls of the deceased could not be admitted into the Elysian shades, but were forced to wander desolate and alone, till their bodies were committed to the earth. Nor was it sufficient to be honoured with the solemn performance of their funeral rites, except their bodies were prepared for burial by their relations, and interred in the sepulchres of their fathers; we must not therefore be surprised to find the whole play of Antigone turning on this single incident; for though the burial of a dead body would make but an indifferent foundation for a modern tragedy, it is a subject of dignity and importance, and highly suitable to the notions and genius of antiquity.

The body of our dear Eteocles,
Whilst Polynices' wretched carcase lies
Unbury'd, unlamented, left expos'd
A feast for hungry vultures on the plain;
No pitying friend will dare to violate
The tyrant's harsh command, for public death
Awaits th' offender; Creon comes himself
To tell us of it, such is our condition;
This is the crisis, this the hour, Ismene,
That must declare thee worthy of thy birth,
Or shew thee mean, base, and degenerate.

ISMENE.

What would'st thou have me do? defy his pow'r?
Contemn the laws?

ANTIGONE.

To act with me, or not:
Consider and resolve.

ISMENE.

What daring deed
Would'st thou attempt? what is it? speak.

ANTIGONE.

To join
And take the body, my Ismene.

ISMENE.

Ha!
And would'st thou dare to bury it, when thus
We are forbidden?

ANTIGONE.

Aye, to bury *Him*;
He is my brother, and thine too, Ismene;

Unlamented. This was the judgement which God denounced against Jehoiakim, king of Judah: 'They shall not lament for him, saying, ah! 'my brother, or ah! sister; they shall not lament for him, saying, ah! 'lord, or ah! his glory; he shall be buried with the burial of an ass, &c. Jerem. xxii. v. 18, 19. The customs and manners of the Greeks were originally drawn from the eastern nations, which accounts for the similitude so observable in Sophocles, and other heathen writers, with some parts of Holy Writ.

Therefore consent or not, I have determin'd
I'll not disgrace my birth.

ISMENE.

Hath not the king
Pronounc'd it death to all?

ANTIGONE.

He hath no right,
No pow'r to keep me from my own.

ISMENE.

Alas!
Remember our unhappy father's fate,
His eyes torn out by his own fatal hand,
Oppress'd with shame and infamy he died;
Fruit of his crimes! a mother, and a wife,
Dreadful alliance! self-devoted, fell;
And last, in one sad day, Eteocles
And Polynices by each other slain.
Left as we are, deserted and forlorn,
What from our disobedience can we hope
But misery and ruin? poor weak women,
Helpless, nor form'd by nature to contend
With powerful man; we are his subjects too;
Therefore to this, and worse than this, my sister,
We must submit: for me, in humblest pray'r
Will I address me to th' infernal pow'rs
For pardon of that crime which well they know
Sprang from necessity, and then obey;
Since to attempt what we can never hope
To execute, is folly all and madness.

ANTIGONE.

Wert thou to proffer what I do not ask,
Thy poor assistance, I wou'd scorn it now:

Consent or not, &c. The characters of Antigone and Ismene are an exact counterpart to those of Electra and Chrysothemis; the fierceness and resolution of the one is contrasted by the softness and timidity of the other. The sentiments are nearly the same throughout, and indeed, the similitude of circumstances considered, this was almost unavoidable.

Act as thou wilt; I'll bury him myself;
Let me perform but that, and death is welcome:
I'll do the pious deed, and lay me down
By my dear brother; loving and belov'd
We'll rest together: to the pow'rs below,
'Tis fit we pay obedience; longer there
We must remain, than we can breathe on earth,
There I shall dwell for ever; thou, mean time,
What the gods hold most precious may'st despise.

ISMENE.

I reverence the gods; but, in defiance
Of laws, and unassisted to do this,
It were most dang'rous.

ANTIGONE.

That be thy excuse,
Whilst I prepare the fun'ral pile.

ISMENE.

Alas!
I tremble for thee.

I tremble for thee, &c. The Antigone of Rotrou, an old French poet, whom Brumoy calls Corneille's master, is a pretty exact copy, and in many parts an almost literal translation of Sophocles; it seems to be written with spirit, as the reader will see by the following quotation:

ISMEN. Ah, que vous me causez une frayeur extrême!
ANTIG. Ne m' épouvantez pas, & tremblez sur vous-même.
ISMEN. Soyez secrette au moins, comme je vous promets
Que par moi ce dessein ne se sçaura jamais.
ANTIG. Si rien est à cacher, cachez votre foiblesse,
Je fais gloire pour moi que ma vertu paroisse.
ISMEN. Comme dans les dangers vous vous précipitez!
ANTIG. Avec autant d'ardeur que vous les évitez.
ISMEN. Je vous l'ai dit cent fois, cette œuvre sera vaine.
ANTIG. Bien, mon pouvoir cessant fera cesser ma peine.
ISMEN. Mais ce n'est pas assez d'entreprendre ardemment:
L'honneur de l'entreprise est en l'événement.
ANTIG. Vos raisons, comme vous, sont de si peu de force,
Que, loin de m'arrêter, cet obstacle m'amorce.
Laissez indifférent mon bon ou mauvais sort;
Voyez, si je péris, mon naufrauge du port.

ANTIGONE.

Tremble for thyself,
And not for me.

ISMENE.

O! do not tell thy purpose,
I beg thee, do not; I shall ne'er betray thee.

ANTIGONE.

I'd have it known; and I shall hate thee more
For thy concealment, than, if loud to all,
Thou would'st proclaim the deed.

ISMENE.

Thou hast a heart
Too daring, and ill-suited to thy fate.

ANTIGONE.

I know my duty, and I'll pay it there
Where 'twill be best accepted.

ISMENE.

Could'st thou do it;
But 'tis not in thy pow'r.

ANTIGONE.

When I know that
It will be time enough to quit my purpose.

ISMENE.

It cannot be; 'tis folly to attempt it.

ANTIGONE.

Go on, and I shall hate thee; our dead brother,
He too shall hate thee as his bitt'rest foe;
Go, leave me here to suffer for my rashness;
Whate'er befalls, it cannot be so dreadful
As not to die with honour.

Pour moi je tiens plus chère & plus digne d'envie
Une honorable mort qu'une honteuse vie;
Et de mes ans ensin voir terminer le cours
Ne sera qu'arriver où je vais tous les jours.

ISMEN. Allez donc: que le Ciel pour vous & pour mon frere
Conduise ce dessein mieux que je ne l'espere!
Mais vos soins, si mon cœur ne m'abuse aujourd'hui,
Préparent un cercueil plus pour vous que pour lui.

ISMENE.

Then farewell,
Since thou wilt have it so; and know, Ismene
Pities thy weakness, but admires thy virtue. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

By Dirce's sweetly-flowing stream,
Ne'er did the golden eye of day
On Thebes with fairer lustre beam,
Or shine with more auspicious ray.
See, the proud Argive with his silver shield,
And glitt'ring armour quits the hostile plain;
No longer dares maintain the luckless field,
But vanquish'd flies, nor checks the loosen'd rein.
With dreadful clangor, like the bird of Jove,
On snowy wings descending from above,

By Dirce's sweetly-flowing stream, &c. The kingdom of Thebes, which had been torn to pieces by the dissention of the two brothers, being at length by their deaths restored to peace and tranquillity, the principal and most antient inhabitants, who form the Chorus, are brought together with the utmost propriety to sing a song of triumph on the occasion: as they are the friends and counsellors of Creon, we find them condemning Polynices as author of the war, and rejoicing in his defeat. George Rataller, the only Latin translator who has ever done justice to Sophocles, has turned this noble Chorus into a good Sapphic Ode.

With dreadful clangor, &c. Ratallerus renders it thus;

Ut Jovis summo veniens Olympo
Armiger plumis coopertus albis,
Devolat, latè strepituq; acuto
Æthera complet.

Constitit celsæ super arcis ædes,
Ense munitus, galeâq; & armis,
Undequaque hastis inhiabat urbi
Sanguine tinctis.

His vaunted pow'rs to this devoted land
In bitt'rest wrath did Polynices lead,
With crested helmets, and a num'rous band
He came, and fondly hop'd that Thebes shou'd bleed.

ANTISTROPHE II.

High on the lofty tow'r he stood,
And view'd th' encircled gates below,
With spears that thirsted for our blood,
And seem'd to scorn th' unequal foe;
But fraught with vengeance, ere the rising flame
Cou'd waste our bulwarks, or our walls surround,
Mars to assist the fiery serpent came,
And brought the tow'ring eagle to the ground.
That god who hates the boastings of the proud,
Saw the rude violence of th' exulting crowd;
Already now the triumph was prepar'd,
The wreath of vict'ry, and the festal song,
When Jove the clash of golden armour heard,
And hurl'd his thunder on the guilty throng.

Victus at fugit trepidè, priùsquam
Posset insanas satiare fauces,
Et nimis nostro cupidum cruore
Tingere guttur.

The fiery serpent, &c. By the dragon or fiery serpent, we are to understand the Theban army, attacked by the eagle Polynices. The Scholiasts, who are always full of whimsical conjectures, will needs have it that the Thebans are here called serpents as descendants of Draco, the son of Mars and Tilphosa, or, as the sons of Cadmus, who sowed the serpent's teeth that sprung up into armed men, as related in the third book of Ovid's Metamorphoses; though it is, after all, most probable that Sophocles meant no more than a comparison of the two armies with creatures of most remarkable enmity to each other, in imitation of his great master Homer, who has made use of this very image on a similar occasion. See Iliad, b. 14, v. 201, with an imitation of it by Virgil, Æn. b. 11, v. 751.

That god who hates, &c. Φιλεει ὁ Θεος (says Herodotus) τα ὑπερεχοντα παντα κολουειν, 'God loveth to cut of every thing that is proud;' agreeable to which is the sentiment of the holy Psalmist, 'The Lord preserveth 'the faithful, and plenteously rewardeth the proud doer. Psalm xxxi, v. 19.

STROPHE II.

Then Capaneus, elate with pride,
Fierce as the rapid whirlwind came,
Eager he seem'd on ev'ry side
To spread the all-devouring flame;
But soon he felt the winged lightning's blast,
By angry heav'n with speedy vengeance sent,
Down from the lofty turrets headlong cast,
For his foul crimes he met the punishment.
Each at his gate, long time the leaders strove,
Then fled, and left their arms to conqu'ring Jove;
Save the unhappy death-devoted pair,
The wretched brethren, who unconquer'd stood,
With ranc'rous hate inspir'd, and fell despair,
They reek'd their vengeance in each other's blood.

ANTISTROPHE II.

And lo! with smiles propitious see
To Thebes, for num'rous cars renown'd,
The goddess comes, fair Victory,
With fame and endless glory crown'd!
Henceforth, no longer vex'd by war's alarms,
Let all our sorrows, all our labours cease;
Come, let us quit the din of rattling arms,
And fill our temples with the songs of peace.
The god of Thebes shall guide our steps aright,
And crown with many a lay the festive night.
But see, still anxious for his native land,
Our king, Menæceus' valiant son appear;
With some fair omen by the gods' command
He comes to meet his aged council here. [*Exeunt.*

Then Capaneus, &c. Capaneus was one of the seven captains who came against Thebes: after he had mounted to the top of the κλιμακες, or scaling ladders, he was beat down with stones and slain; which gave the poets an opportunity of reporting him to have been struck dead with lightning. Statius calls him, 'superum contemptor,' 'a contemner of 'the gods.'

Each at his gate, &c. The Greek is, the seven leaders stood at the seven gates.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

At length our empire, shook by civil broils,
The gods to peace and safety have restor'd;
Wherefore, my friends, you had our late request
That you shou'd meet us here; for well I know
Your firm allegiance to great Laius, next
To Œdipus, and his unhappy sons;
These by each other's hand untimely slain,
To me the sceptre doth of right descend,
As next in blood: never can man be known,
His mind, his will, his passions ne'er appear
Till pow'r and office call them forth; for me,
'Tis my firm thought, and I have held it ever,
That he who rules and doth not follow that
Which wisdom counsels, but restrain'd by fear
Shuts up his lips, must be the worst of men;
Nor do I deem him worthy who prefers
A friend, how dear soever, to his country.
Shou'd I behold (witness all-seeing Jove)
This city wrong'd, I never wou'd be silent,
Never wou'd make the foe of Thebes my friend,
For on her safety must depend our own;
And if she flourish we can never want
Assistance or support: thus wou'd I act,
And therefore have I sent my edict forth
Touching the sons of Œdipus, commanding
That they shou'd bury him who nobly fought
And died for Thebes, the good Eteocles,
Gracing his mem'ry with each honour due
To the illustrious deed; for Polynices,
Abandon'd exile, for a brother's blood

Thirsting insatiate, he who wou'd in flames
Have wasted all, his country, and his gods,
And made you slaves, I have decreed he lie
Unburied, his vile carcase to the birds
And hungry dogs a prey; there let him rot
Inglorious, 'tis my will; for ne'er from me
Shall vice inherit virtue's due reward,
But him alone who is a friend to Thebes,
Living or dead shall Creon rev'rence still.

CHORUS.

Son of Menæceus, 'twas thy great behest
Thus to reward them both; thine is the pow'r
O'er all supreme, the living and the dead.

CREON.

Be careful then my orders are obey'd.

CHORUS.

O! Sir, to younger hands commit the task.

CREON.

I have appointed some to watch the body.

CHORUS.

What then remains for us?

Him alone, &c. Creon, conscious to himself that the edict forbidding the burial of Polynices must be highly unpopular, and would probably be construed by his subjects as an act of arbitrary power, calls a council of the principal and most antient inhabitants of Thebes, to whom he artfully represents his conduct, not as the effect of private resentment, but of his zealous regard for the public welfare; and as he was apprehensive that the friends of Polynices would, in spite of all his precautions, bury the body, he prepares them for that severity with which he had resolved to treat the offender. The council, we may observe, is composed of slaves, who are obliged to assent to what they could not approve, and submit to orders which they could not resist. By this lively representation of the evils and miseries of an arbitrary government, the poet pays an oblique compliment to his countrymen the Athenians, who would naturally take a pleasure in comparing it with the freedom and happiness of their own. The Chorus, according to Horace, should indeed always appear as the friends of distressed virtue; but in this case Sophocles, we see, is excusable, as it could not be done, considering whom they are composed of, with any degree of propriety.

CREON.

To see that none
By your connivance violate the law.

CHORUS.

Scarce will the man be found so fond of death
As to attempt it.

CREON.

Death is the reward
Of him who dares it; but oft'times by hope
Of sordid gain are men betray'd to ruin.

SCENE II.

MESSENGER, CREON, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

O! king, I cannot boast, that hither sent
I came with speed, for oft my troubled thoughts
Have driv'n me back; oft to myself I said,
Why dost thou seek destruction? yet again
If thou report it not, from other tongues
Creon must hear the tale; and thou wilt suffer:
With doubts like these oppress'd, slowly I came,
And the short way seem'd like a tedious journey;
At length I come, resolv'd to tell thee all:
Whate'er th' event, I must submit to fate.

CREON.

Whence are thy fears, and why this hesitation?

MESSENGER.

First for myself; I merit not thy wrath;

For myself, &c. The servant in Terence prefaces his tale with the like formality;

Here, primum te arbitrari quod res est velim,
Quicquid hujus factum est, culpâ non factum est meâ.

It was not I, nor have I seen the man
Who did the guilty deed.

CREON.

Something of weight
Thou hast t' impart, by this unusual care
To guard thee from our anger.

MESSENGER.

Fear will come
Where danger is.

CREON.

Speak, and thou hast thy pardon.

MESSENGER.

The body of Polynices some rash hand
Hath buried, scatter'd o'er his corpse the dust,
And fun'ral rites perform'd.

CREON.

Who dar'd do this?

MESSENGER.

'Tis yet unknown; no mark of instrument
Is left behind; the earth still level all,
Nor worn by track of chariot wheel; the guard,
Who watch'd that day, call it a miracle;
No tomb was rais'd; light lay the scatter'd earth,
As only meant t' avoid th' imputed curse;
Nor cou'd we trace the steps of dog or beast
Passing that way; instant a tumult rose,
The guards accus'd each other; nought was prov'd,
But each suspected each, and all denied,

As only meant, &c. In Greece the person was looked on as accursed, and guilty of the greatest inhumanity, who passed by an unburied corpse without casting dust or soft earth upon it, which, in cases of necessity, was considered as sufficient to gain the ghost's admission into Pluto's dominions; travellers, therefore, though in ever so much haste, if they met with a dead body, thought it their duty to sprinkle it three times in this manner. The custom is alluded to by Horace:

Quanquam festinas, non est mora longa, licebit
Injecto ter pulvere, curras. Lib. 1. Od. 28.

Off'ring, in proof of innocence, to grasp
The burning steel, to walk thro' fire, and take
Their solemn oath they knew not of the deed;
At length, one mightier than the rest, propos'd
(Nor cou'd we think of better means) that all
Shou'd be to thee discover'd; 'twas my lot
To bring th' unwelcome tidings, and I come
To pour my news unwilling into ears
Unwilling to receive it, for I know
None ever lov'd the messenger of *ill*.

CHORUS.

To me it seems as if the hand of heav'n
Were in this deed.

CREON.

Be silent, ere my rage,
Thou rash old man, pronounce thee fool and dotard;
Horrid suggestion! think'st thou then, the gods
Take care of men like these? wou'd they preserve,
Or honour him who came to burn their altars,
Profane their rites, and trample on their laws?
Will they reward the bad? it cannot be:
But well I know, the murm'ring citizens
Brook'd not our mandate, shook their heads in secret,
And ill-affected to me, wou'd not stoop
Their haughty crests, or bend beneath my yoke;
By hire corrupted, some of these have dar'd

To grasp the burning steel. It was usual, in antient Greece, for persons accused of any considerable crime to clear themselves from the imputation, by taking a solemn oath that they were not guilty of it, at the same time holding in their hands a red hot iron called Μυδρος, which, if they expressed no sense of pain, was admitted as a sufficient proof of their innocence.

To walk thro' fire. This method of clearing themselves is exactly similar to our Saxon custom of purgation by fire-ordeal, wherein the person accused passed blindfold and barefooted over red-hot plough-shares. This is said to have been performed by Emma, the mother of Edward the Confessor, to vindicate her honour from the scandal of incontinency, with Alwyn, bishop of Winchester.

The vent'rous deed: gold is the worst of ills
That ever plagu'd mankind; this wastes our cities,
Drives forth their natives to a foreign soil,
Taints the pure heart, and turns the virtuous mind
To basest deeds; artificer of fraud
Supreme, and source of ev'ry wickedness:
The wretch corrupted for this hateful purpose
Must one day suffer; for, observe me well,
As I revere that pow'r by whom I swear,
Almighty Jove, if you conceal him from me,
If to my eyes you do not bring the traitor,
Know, death alone shall not suffice to glut
My vengeance; living shall you hang in torments
Till you confess, till you have learn'd from me
There is a profit not to be desir'd,
And own, dishonest gains have ruin'd more
Than they have sav'd.

MESSENGER.

O, king! may I depart,
Or wait thy further orders?

CREON.

Know'st thou not
Thy speech is hateful?—hence.

MESSENGER.

Wherefore, my lord?

CREON.

Know you not why?

MESSENGER.

I but offend your ear,
They who have done the deed afflict your soul.

CREON.

Away; thy talk but makes thy guilt appear.

MESSENGER.

My lord, I did not do it.

CREON.

Thou hast sold
Thy life for gain.

MESSENGER.

'Tis cruel to suspect me.

CREON.

Thou talk'st it bravely; but remember all,
Unless you do produce him, you shall shall find,
The mis'ries which on ill-got wealth await. [*Exit.*

MESSENGER.

Wou'd he were found! that we must leave to fate;
Be't as it may, I never will return;
Thus safe beyond my hopes, 'tis fit I pay
My thanks to the kind gods who have preserv'd me.
[*Exit.*

SCENE III.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Since first this active world began.
Nature is busy all in ev'ry part;
But passing all in wisdom and in art,
Superior shines inventive man:
Fearless of wint'ry winds, and circling waves,
He rides the ocean and the tempest braves;
On him unwearied earth with lavish hand,
Immortal goddess, all her bounty pours,
Patient beneath the rigid plough's command,
Year after year she yields her plenteous stores.

ANTISTROPHE I.

To drive the natives of the wood
From their rude haunts, or in the cruel snare,

Since first this, &c. This intermede, or song of the Chorus, seems to hive less connection with the subject of the tragedy, than perhaps any other in Sophocles; it describes the extensive range of human science, and its application to good or evil purposes, according to the disposition of men. 'Cette morale (says Brumoy) tombe sur le pretendu coupable, 'qui a eu l'adresse de rendre les derniers devoirs à Polynice, malgrè 'l'attention des gardes, sans pouvoir toutefois eviter le supplice qui 'l'attend.' But surely the refinement of French criticism is required to discover an allusion so distant: the Ode however abounds in fine sentiment and expression, and if not necessary to the business, may, at least, be considered as an agreeable ornament to the drama.

To catch the wing'd inhabitants of air,
Or trap the scaly brood;
To tame the fiery courser yet unbroke
With the hard rein, or to the untried yoke
To bend the mountain bull, who wildly free
O'er the steep rocks had wander'd unconfin'd;
These are the arts of mortal industry,
And such the subtle pow'r of human kind.

STROPHE II.

By learning, and fair science crown'd,
Behold him now full-fraught with wisdom's lore,
The laws of nature anxious to explore,
With depth of thought profound.
But nought, alas! can human wisdom see
In the dark bosom of futurity.
The pow'r of wisdom may awhile prevail,
Awhile suspend a mortal's fleeting breath,
But never can her fruitless arts avail
To conquer fate, or stop the hand of death.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Man's ever-active changeful will
Sometimes to good shall bend his virtuous mind,
Sometimes behold him to foul deeds inclin'd,
And prone to ev'ry ill.
Who guiltless keeps the laws is still approv'd
By ev'ry tongue, and by his country lov'd;
But he who doth not, from his native land
A wretched exile, far, O! far from me
May he be driv'n, by angry heav'n's command,
And live devote to shame and infamy!

Far, O! far from me, &c. The Greek is μητ' εμοι παρεστιος, γενηται, 'ne mecum habitet,' 'let not such a one live under the same roof with 'me.' Vetabo, says Horace,

——————— sub iisdem
Sit trabibus, fragilemve mecum
Solvat Phaselum Lib. 3. Od. 2.

CHORUS.

Amazement! can it be Antigone,
Or do my eyes deceive me! no, she comes.
O! wretched daughter of a wretched father,
Hast thou transgress'd the laws, and art thou ta'en
In this advent'rous deed, unhappy maid?

SCENE IV.

ANTIGONE, GUARD, CHORUS.

Behold the woman who hath done the deed;
I' th' very act of burial we surpris'd her.
Where is the king?

CHORUS.

Return'd, as we cou'd wish;
E'en now he comes this way.

SCENE V.

CREON, ANTIGONE, GUARD, CHORUS.

CREON.

Whom have we here?
Doth justice smile upon us?

GUARD.

O! my lord,
Never shou'd man too confident assert,
Much less by oath shou'd bind himself to aught,
For soon our judgements change, and one opinion
Destroys another; by thy threats alarm'd
But now, I vow'd I never wou'd return,
Yet thus preserv'd, beyond my hopes, I come
Bound by that duty which I owe to thee
And to my country, to bring here this virgin,
Whom, as she sprinkled o'er her brother's dust
The varied wreath, we seiz'd; the willing task
Was mine, nor as of late by lot determin'd,

Receive her then, O king! judge and condemn
The guilty, as it best becomes thy wisdom;
Henceforth I stand acquitted.

CREON.

But say how,
Where did'st thou find her?

GUARD.

To say all, 'twas she
Who buried Polynices.

CREON.

Art thou sure?

GUARD.

These eyes beheld her.

CREON.

But say, how discover'd?

GUARD.

Thus then it was; no sooner had I left thee
Than mindful of thy wrath, with careful hands
From off the putrid carcase we remov'd
The scatter'd dust, then to avoid the stench,
Exhaling noisome, to a hill retir'd;
There watch'd at distance, till the mid-day sun
Scorch'd o'er our heads; sudden a storm arose,
Shook ev'ry leaf, and rattled thro' the grove,
Filling the troubled element; we clos'd
Our eyes, and patient bore the wrath of heav'n:
At length the tempest ceas'd; when we beheld
This virgin issuing forth, and heard her cries
Distressful, like the plaintive bird who views
The plunder'd nest, and mourns her ravish'd young;
E'en thus the maid, when on the naked corse
She cast her eyes, loud shriek'd, and curs'd the hand
That did the impious deed, then sprinkled o'er
The crumbled earth, and from a brazen urn,
Of richest work, to the lov'd relicks thrice
Her due libations pour'd; we saw, and straight
Pursu'd her; unappall'd she seem'd, and still

As we did question her, confess'd it all.
It pleas'd, and yet methought it griev'd me too.
To find ourselves releas'd from woe is bliss
Supreme, but thus to see our friends unhappy
Embitters all; I must be thankful still
For my own safety, which I hold most dear.

CREON.

Speak thou, who bend'st to earth thy drooping head;
Dost thou deny the fact?

ANTIGONE.

Deny it? no:
'Twas I.

CREON *(to the* GUARD.*)*

Retire, for thou art free, and now
[*turning to* ANTIGONE.
Be brief, and tell me; heard'st thou our decree?

ANTIGONE.

I did; 'twas public; how cou'd I avoid it?

CREON.

And dar'st thou then to disobey the law?

ANTIGONE.

I had it not from Jove, nor the just gods
Who rule below; nor cou'd I ever think
A mortal's law of pow'r or strength sufficient
To abrogate th' unwritten law divine,
Immutable, eternal, not like these
Of yesterday, but made ere time began.
Shall man persuade me then to violate
Heav'n's great commands, and make the gods my foes?
Without thy mandate, death had one day come;
For who shall 'scape it? and if now I fall
A little sooner, 'tis the thing I wish.
To those who live in misery like me,
Believe me, king, 'tis happiness to die;
Without remorse I shall embrace my fate;
But to my brother had I left the rites
Of sepulture unpaid, I then indeed

Had been most wretched; this to thee may seem
Madness and folly; if it be, 'tis fit
I shou'd act thus, it but resembles thee.

CREON.

Sprung from a sire perverse and obstinate,
Like him, she cannot bend beneath misfortune;
But know, the proudest hearts may be subdu'd;
Hast thou not mark'd the hardest steel by fire
Made soft and flexible? myself have seen
By a slight rein the fiery courser held.
'Tis not for slaves to be so haughty; yet
This proud offender, not content, it seems,
To violate my laws, adds crime to crime;
Smiles at my threats, and glories in her guilt;
If I shou'd suffer her to 'scape my vengeance,
She were the man, not I; but tho' she sprang
E'en from my sister, were I bound to her
By ties more dear than is Hercæan Jove,
She shou'd not 'scape; her sister too I find
Accomplice in the deed; go, call her forth,
[*to one of the Attendants.*
She is within, I saw her raving there,
Her senses lost, the common fate of those
Who practise dark and deadly wickedness.
[*turning to* ANTIGONE.
I cannot bear to see the guilty stand
Convicted of their crimes, and yet pretend

If it be, &c. Literally translated it would be 'I talk foolishly to a 'fool;' this is exactly what Electra says to Clytemnestra. See Electra, p. 88.

Hercæan Jove. Jupiter Hercæus, so called from being the guardian of every man's private habitation: in times of war and calamity, altars were erected to him, to which the unhappy fled as an asylum. Priam is reported to have been slain before one of these, as is alluded to by Ovid;

Cura nihil Hercæi profuit ara Jovis. Ov. in Ibin.

The common fate, &c. According to the old adage.

Quos Deus vult perdere, dementat prius.

To gloss them o'er with specious names of virtue.

ANTIGONE.

I am thy captive; thou would'st have my life;
Will that content thee?

CREON.

Yes; 'tis all I wish.

ANTIGONE.

Why this delay then, when thou know'st my words
To thee as hateful are, as thine to me?
Therefore dispatch; I cannot live to do
A deed more glorious; and so these wou'd all
[pointing to the CHORUS.
Confess, were not their tongues restrain'd by fear;
It is the tyrant's privilege, we know,
To speak and act whate'er he please, uncensur'd.

CREON.

Lives there another in the land of Thebes,
Who thinks as thou dost?

ANTIGONE.

Yes, a thousand; these,
These think so too, but dare not utter it.

CREON.

Dost thou not blush?

ANTIGONE.

For what? why blush to pay
A sister's duty?

CREON.

But, Eteocles,
Say, was not he thy brother too?

ANTIGONE.

He was.

He was. The original is, 'he was my brother by the same father, and 'by the same mother;' the Greek writers, though generally concise, are sometimes very prolix, as in the passage before us, where the sentiment takes up a whole line in the original, and is better expressed in these two words of the translation.

CREON.

Why then thus rev'rence him who least deserv'd it?

ANTIGONE.

Perhaps that brother thinks not so.

CREON.

He must,
If thou pay'st equal honour to them both.

ANTIGONE.

He was a brother, not a slave.

CREON.

One fought
Against that country, which the other sav'd.

ANTIGONE.

But equal death the rites of sepulture
Decrees to both.

CREON.

What! reverence alike
The guilty and the innocent!

ANTIGONE.

Perhaps
The gods below esteem it just.

CREON.

A foe
Though dead, shou'd as a foe be treated still.

ANTIGONE.

My love shall go with thine, but not my hate.

CREON.

Go then, and love them in the tomb; but know,
No woman rules in Thebes, whilst Creon lives.

CHORUS.

Lo! at the portal stands the fair Ismene,
Tears in her lovely eyes, a cloud of grief
Sits on her brow, wetting her beauteous cheek
With pious sorrow for a sister's fate.

SCENE VI.

ISMENE, ANTIGONE, CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

Come forth, thou serpent, little did I think
That I had nourish'd two such deadly foes
To suck my blood, and cast me from my throne:
What say'st thou? wert thou 'complice in the deed,
Or wilt thou swear that thou art innocent?

ISMENE.

I do acknowledge it, if she permit me,
I was accomplice, and the crime was mine.

ANTIGONE.

'Tis false, thou did'st refuse, nor wou'd I hold
Communion with thee.

ISMENE.

But in thy misfortunes
Let me partake, my sister, let me be
A fellow-suff'rer with thee.

ANTIGONE.

Witness, death,
And ye infernal gods, to which belongs
The great, the glorious deed! I do not love
These friends in word alone.

ISMENE.

Antigone,
Do not despise me, I but ask to die
With thee, and pay due honours to the dead.

ANTIGONE.

Pretend not to a merit which thou hast not.
Live thou; it is enough for me to perish.

ISMENE.

But what is life without thee?

ANTIGONE.

Ask thy friend
And patron there. [*pointing to* CREON.

ISMENE.

Why that unkind reproach,
When thou should'st rather comfort me?

ANTIGONE.

Alas!
It gives me pain when I am forc'd to speak
So bitterly against thee.

ISMENE.

Is there aught
That I can do to save thee?

ANTIGONE.

Save thyself,
I shall not envy thee.

ISMENE.

And will you not
Permit me then to share your fate?

ANTIGONE.

Thy choice
Was life; 'tis mine to die.

ISMENE.

I told thee oft
It wou'd be so.

ANTIGONE.

Thou did'st, and was't not well
Thus to fulfil thy prophecy?

ISMENE.

The crime
Was mutual, mutual be the punishment.

ANTIGONE.

Fear not; thy life is safe, but mine long since
Devoted to the dead.

CREON.

Both seem depriv'd
Of reason; one indeed was ever thus.

ISMENE.

O King! the mind doth seldom keep her seat
When sunk beneath misfortunes.

CREON.

Sunk indeed
Thou wert in wretchedness to join with her.

ISMENE.

But what is life without Antigone?

CREON.

Then think not of it; for she is no more.

ISMENE.

Would'st thou destroy thy son's long-destin'd wife?

CREON.

O! we shall find a fitter bride.

ISMENE.

Alas!
He will not think so.

CREON.

I'll not wed my son
To a base woman.

ANTIGONE.

O! my dearest Hæmon!
And is it thus thy father doth disgrace thee?

CREON.

Such an alliance were as hateful to me
As is thyself.

ISMENE.

Wilt thou then take her from him?

O! we shall find a fitter bride. The original is, Αρωσιμοι γαρ χ' ἁτερων εισιν γυαι, 'arabilia sunt aliorum arva,' which, literally translated, is, 'there are other fields to be till'd.' As this image might be thought a little too gross for modern delicacy, I have dropped it, and only retained the sentiment which it was designed to convey. Ratallerus has softened it thus, 'haud fæminæ deerunt creandis liberis.'

O! my dearest Hæmon. Antigone's love of Hæmon heightens the distress of the tragedy, by setting in a stronger light the tyranny of Creon, who thus sacrifices the happiness of his son to his resentment. Antigone becomes likewise a greater object of compassion; in spite of all her courage and resolution, a sigh escapes her for the fate of Hæmon, doomed to feel such misfortunes from an unnatural father. Her complaint consists but of a line, which a modern writer would have spun out to many a page.

CREON.

Their nuptials shall be finished by death.

ISMENE.

She then must perish?

CREON.

So must you and I;
Therefore no more delay; go, take them hence,
Confine them both: henceforth they shall not stir;
When death is near at hand the bravest fly.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thrice happy they, whose days in pleasure flow,
Who never taste the bitter cup of woe;
For when the wrath of heav'n descends
On some devoted house, there foul disgrace,
With grief and all her train attends,
And shame and sorrow o'erwhelm the wretched race.
E'en as the Thracian sea, when vex'd with storms,
Whilst darkness hangs incumbent o'er the deep,
When the black North the troubled scene deforms,
And the black sands in rapid whirlwinds sweep,
The groaning waves beat on the trembling shore,
And echoing hills rebellow to the roar.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O! Labdacus, thy house must perish all;
E'en now I see the stately ruin fall;
Shame heap'd on shame, and ill on ill,
Disgrace and never-ending woes;
Some angry god pursues thee still,
Nor grants or safety or repose:

Thrice happy they, &c. This beautiful intermede, or song of the Chorus, arises naturally from the preceding circumstances, and laments the ruin of the family of Œdipus. The Strophe, on the power and knowledge of Jupiter, is noble and poetical, and gives us a favourable idea of heathen piety and virtue.

O! Labdacus, &c. The genealogy of the unfortunate house of Œdipus, runs thus, 'Cadmus, Polydorus, Labdacus, Laius, Œdipus, Eteocles, Polynices, Antigone, and Ismene.'

One fair and lovely branch unwither'd stood
And brav'd th' inclement skies;
But Pluto comes, inexorable god,
She sinks, she raves, she dies.

STROPHE II.

Shall man below control the gods above,
Whose eyes by all-subduing sleep
Are never clos'd as feeble mortals are,
But still their watchful vigils keep
Through the large circle of th' eternal year!
Great lord of all, whom neither time nor age
With envious stroke can weaken or decay;
He, who alone the future can presage,
Who knows alike to-morrow as to-day;
Whilst wretched man is doom'd, by heav'n's decree,
To toil and pain, to sin and misery.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Oft times the flatt'rer hope, that joy inspires,
Fills the proud heart of man with fond desires;
He, careless trav'ller, wanders still
Thro' life, unmindful of deceit,

One fair and lovely branch, &c. The Chorus here plainly allude to the unfortunate Antigone, whom Pluto, or the infernal gods, obliged to pay funeral rites to her brother Polynices.

Whose eyes, &c. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." Behold "he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Psalm cxxi. v. 3, 4.

Th' eternal year. The Greek is ακαμαντοι θεων μηνες 'the untired 'months of the gods,' which conveys a fine image, but would not admit of a literal translation.

He, careless trav'ller, &c. Sophocles says,

Ειδοτι δ' ωδεν, ἑρπει
Πριν πυρι δερμω ποδα τις προσαψη·

'Nihil enim scienti contingit,
'Priusquam igni ardenti pedem quis admoverit.'

This beautiful image is, we see, but imperfectly glanced at in the original; I have endeavoured to express it more fully in the translation. Horace seems to have caught this idea, in his

'Incedis per ignes
'Suppositos cineri doloso.'

Nor dreads the danger, till he feel
The burning sands beneath his feet.
When heav'n impels to guilt the madd'ning mind,
Then good like ill appears,
And vice, for universal hate design'd,
The face of virtue wears. [*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.

CREON, HÆMON, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Behold, O! king, thy youngest hope appear
The noble Hæmon; lost in grief he seems,
Weeping the fate of poor Antigone.

CREON.

He comes, and better than a prophet, soon
Shall we divine his inmost thoughts: my son,
Com'st thou, well-knowing our decree, to mourn
Thy promis'd bride, and angry to dispute
A father's will; or, whatsoe'er we do
Still to hold best, and pay obedience to us?

HÆMON.

My father, I am thine; do thou command,
And I in all things shall obey; 'tis fit
My promis'd nuptial rites give place to thee.

CREON.

It will become thee with obedience thus
To bear thee ever, and in ev'ry act
To yield submissive to a father's will:
'Tis therefore, O! my son, that men do pray
For children, who with kind officious duty
May guard their helpless age, resist their foes,
And like their parents love their parent's friend;
But he, who gets a disobedient child,

What doth he get but misery and woe?
His enemies will laugh the wretch to scorn.
Take heed, my son, thou yield not up thy reason,
In hopes of pleasure from a worthless woman;
For cold is the embrace of impious love,
And deep the wounds of false dissembled friendship;
Hate then thy bitt'rest foe, despise her arts,
And leave her to be wedded to the tomb;
Of all the city her alone I found
Rebellious; but I have her, nor shall Thebes
Say I'm a liar; I pronounc'd her fate,
And she must perish; let her call on Jove
Who guards the rights of kindred, and the ties
Of nature; for if those by blood united
Transgress the laws, I hold myself more near
E'en to a stranger: who in private life
Is just and good, will to his country too
Be faithful ever; but the man, who proud
And fierce of soul, contemns authority,
Despiseth justice, and o'er those who rule
Wou'd have dominion, such shall never gain
Th' applauding voice of Creon; he alone,
Whom the consenting citizens approve,
Th' acknowledg'd sov'reign, shou'd in all command;
Just or unjust his laws, in things of great

His enemies, &c. The scripture expression, which I have here made use of, seems to convey the most exact idea of the original; one cannot read this passage of Sophocles, without recollecting the words of the holy Psalmist;

'Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children;

'Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not 'be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm. cxxvii, v. 5, 6.

Th' acknowledg'd sov'reign, &c. Sophocles, with the utmost propriety, puts the maxims of arbitrary government into the mouth of a tyrant, whose character he designs to render most odious and detestable to his countrymen, the free citizens of Athens. In the old poet Rotrou, we

Or little import, whatsoe'er he bids,
A subject is not to dispute his will;
He knows alike to rule and to obey;
And in the day of battle will maintain
The foremost rank, his country's best defence.
Rebellion is the worst of human ills;
This ruins kingdoms, this destroys the peace
Of noblest families, this wages war,
And puts the brave to flight; whilst fair obedience
Keeps all in safety; to preserve it ever
Shou'd be a king's first care; we will not yield
To a weak woman; if we must submit,
At least we will be conquer'd by a man,
Nor by a female arm thus fall inglorious.

HÆMON.

Wisdom, my father, is the noblest gift
The gods bestow on man, and better far
Than all his treasures; what thy judgement deems
Most fit, I cannot, wou'd not reprehend;
Others perhaps might call it wrong; for me,
My duty only bids me to inform you
If aught be done or said that casts reproach
Or blame on you: such terror wou'd thy looks
Strike on the low plebeian, that he dare not
Say aught unpleasing to thee; be it mine
To tell thee then, what I of late have heard

find the passage before us thus illustrated and adapted to a French theatre;

'Sur les desseins des Rois, comme sur ceux des dieux,
'Des fidéles sujets doivent fermer les yeux,
'Et soumettant leur sens au pouvoir des couronnes,
'Quelles que soient les loix, croire qu'elles sont bonnes.

Such terror, &c. Retrou has translated, or rather paraphrased this with spirit;

Jamais la verité, cette fille timide,
Pour entrer chez les rois ne trouve qui la guide,
Au lieu que le mensonge a mille partisans,
Et vous est présenté par mille courtisans.

In secret whisper'd; your afflicted people
United mourn th' unhappy virgin's fate
Unmerited, most wretched of her sex,
To die for deeds of such distinguish'd virtue,
For that she wou'd not let a brother lie
Unburied, to the dogs and birds a prey;
Was it not rather, say the murm'ring crowd,
Worthy of golden honours, and fair praise?
Such are their dark and secret discontents.
Thy welfare, and thy happiness alone
Are all my wish; what can a child desire
More than a father's honour, or a father
More than his child's? O! do not then retain
Thy will, and still believe no sense but thine
Can judge aright: the man who proudly thinks
None but himself or eloquent, or wise,
By time betray'd, is branded for an ideot;
True wisdom will be ever glad to learn,
And not too fond of pow'r; observe the trees
That bend to wintry torrents, how their boughs
Unhurt remain, whilst those that brave the storm,
Uprooted torn, shall wither and decay;
The pilot, whose unslacken'd sail defies
Contending winds, with shatter'd bark pursues
His dang'rous course: then mitigate thy wrath,
My father, and give way to sweet repentance.
If to my youth be aught of judgement giv'n,
He, who by knowledge and true wisdom's rules
Guides ev'ry action, is the first of men;
But since to few that happiness is giv'n,
The next is he, who, not too proud to learn,

What can a child, &c. The filial piety, obedience, and softness of Hæmon, is finely contrasted to the imperious severity, and inexorable cruelty of his father; we cannot, at the same time, but perceive that his answer to Creon is, considering his circumstances, rather too cold and sententious; 'la morale (as Brumoy observes) est poussée assez 'loin, à la maniére des Grecs.'

Follows the counsels of the wise and good.

CHORUS.

O! king, if right the youth advise, 'tis fit
That thou should'st listen to him; so to thee
Shou'd he attend, as best may profit both.

CREON.

And have we liv'd so long then to be taught
At last our duty by a boy like thee?

HÆMON.

Young tho' I am, I still may judge aright;
Wisdom in action lies, and not in years.

CREON.

Call you it wisdom then to honour those
Who disobey the laws?

HÆMON.

I wou'd not have thee
Protect the wicked.

CREON.

Is she not most guilty?

HÆMON.

Thebes doth not think her so.

CREON.

Shall Thebes prescribe
To Creon's will?

HÆMON.

How weakly dost thou talk!

CREON.

Am I king here, or shall another reign?

HÆMON.

'Tis not a city, where but one man rules.

CREON.

The city is the king's.

HÆMON.

Go by thyself then,

Wisdom in action, &c. 'Honourable age (says Solomon) is not that 'which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of 'years; but wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life 'is old age.' Book of Wisdom.

And rule henceforth o'er a deserted land.

CREON *(to the* CHORUS.*)*

He pleads the woman's cause.

HÆMON.

If thou art she,
I do; for, O! I speak but for thy sake;
My care is all for thee.

CREON.

Abandon'd wretch!
Dispute a father's will!

HÆMON.

I see thee err,
And therefore do it.

CREON.

Is it then a crime
To guard my throne and rights from violation?

HÆMON.

He cannot guard them, who contemns the gods,
And violates their laws.

CREON.

O! thou art worse,
More impious e'en than her thou hast defended.

HÆMON.

Nought have I done to merit this reproof.

CREON.

Hast thou not pleaded for her?

HÆMON.

No; for thee,
And for myself; for the infernal gods.

CREON.

But know, she shall not live to be thy wife.

HÆMON.

Then she must die; another too may fall.

Another to may fall. The Greek is θανοῦ' ὅλλυ τινα· 'Whenever she 'dies she will destroy somebody.' The sense, we see, is purposely left ambiguous; Creon imagines that Hæmon has a design upon his life; it appears afterwards that he means his own. This whole scene consists, in the original, of short speeches of one verse each, containing an equal

CREON.

Ha! dost thou threaten me? audacious traitor!

HÆMON.

What are my threats? alas! thou heed'st them not.

CREON.

That thou shalt see; thy insolent instruction
Shall cost thee dear.

HÆMON.

But for thou art my father
Now won'd I say thy senses were impair'd.

CREON.

Think not to make me thus thy scorn and laughter,
Thou woman's slave.

HÆMON.

Still would'st thou speak thyself,
And never listen to the voice of truth;
Such is thy will.

CREON.

Now by Olympus here
I swear, thy vile reproaches shall not pass
Unpunish'd; call her forth:

[*To one of the Attendants.*

Before her bridegroom
She shall be brought, and perish in his sight.

HÆMON.

These eyes shall never see it; let the slaves
Who fear thy rage submit to it; but know,
'Tis the last time thou shalt behold thy son.

[*Exit* HÆMON.

number of syllables in every line, which, one would imagine, must have caused a disagreeable monotony throughout, a circumstance which I have endeavoured to avoid in the translation, by frequently dividing the blank verse between the two speakers, which relieves the ear of the reader, and would on the stage give more life and spirit to the action.

SCENE II.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Sudden in anger fled the youth; O! king,
A mind oppress'd like his is desperate.

CREON.

Why, let him go; and henceforth better learn
Than to oppose me; be it as it may,
Death is their portion, and he shall not save them.

CHORUS.

Must they both die then?

CREON.

No; 'tis well advis'd,
Ismene lives; but for Antigone ——

CHORUS.

O! king, what death is she decreed to suffer?

CREON.

Far from the haunts of men I'll have her led,
And in a rocky cave, beneath the earth,
Buried alive; with her a little food,
Enough to save the city from pollution;
There let her pray the only god she worships
To save her from this death: perhaps he will,
Or if he doth not, let her learn how vain
It is to reverence the pow'rs below. [*Exit* CREON.

, *With her a little food.* To destroy any one by famine was looked on by the Grecians as impious; probably (as is observed by the Scholiast on this passage) because it reflected disgrace on any country to suffer its inhabitants to perish by hunger; when they buried persons alive, therefore, it was customary to give them a small quantity of victuals, 'ὁπως μιασμα (says Sophocles) ὑπεκφυγοι πολις,' 'that the city might escape pollution;' a piece of Pagan superstition not unlike our modern jesuitism, calculated, we may observe, with a design to separate crimes from guilt, and give tyrants a power to gratify their resentment with impunity.

SCENE III.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Mighty pow'r, all pow'rs above,
Great unconquerable love!
Thou, who liest in dimple sleek
On the tender virgin's cheek,
Thee the rich and great obey,
Ev'ry creature owns thy sway.
O'er the wide earth and o'er the main
Extends thy universal reign;
All thy madd'ning influence know,
Gods above, and men below;
All thy pow'rs resistless prove,
Great unconquerable love!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou canst lead the just astray
From wisdom and from virtue's way;
The ties of nature cease to bind,
When thou disturb'st the captive mind.
Behold, enslav'd by fond desire,
The youth contemns his aged sire,
Enamour'd of his beauteous maid,
Nor laws nor parents are obey'd;
Thus Venus wills it from above,
And great unconquerable love.

CHORUS.

E'en I, beyond the common bounds of grief,
Indulge my sorrows, and from these sad eyes

Mighty pow'r, &c. The ladies will probably be surprised, and, I doubt not, equally pleased, to meet, in so antient a writer as Sophocles, with an ode expressly on the power of love; though they may, at the same time, find fault with my author's brevity on a subject so extensive.

Fountains of tears will flow, when I behold
Antigone, unhappy maid, approach
The bed of death, and hasten to the tomb.

SCENE IV.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

Farewell, my friends, my countrymen, farewell!
Here on her last sad journey you behold
The poor Antigone; for never more
Shall I return, or view the light of day:
The hand of death conducts me to the shore
Of dreary Acheron; no nuptial song
Reserv'd for me, the wretched bride alone
Of Pluto now, and wedded to the tomb.

CHORUS.

Be it thy glory still, that by the sword
Thou fall'st not, nor the slow-consuming hand
Of foul distemp'rature, but far distinguish'd
Above thy sex, and to thyself a law,
Doom'st thy own death, so shall thy honour live,
And future ages venerate thy name.

Farewell my friends, &c. This lamentation of Antigone, though perhaps more agreeable to the taste of the antients than our own, is extremely beautiful and pathetic; we meet with another of the same kind in the last act of the Iphigenia in Aulis, by Euripides. Such, we may imagine, was the lamentation of the daughter of Jephtha, when she went with her companions and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains, as it is related in the twelfth chapter of the book of Judges. Brumoy judiciously observes on this passage, that the grief here expressed by Antigone is not in the least inconsistent with her character; as to meet death with insensibility is rather brutality than heroism. At the same time that Antigone makes the sacrifice of life, she seems conscious of its value; her complaints are the last sighs of nature, which, so far from diminishing true greatness of mind, serve but to give it a more distinguishing lustre. The speeches of Antigone (in the original) are in Strophe and Antistrophe, but as they are interrupted by the replies of the Chorus, would, I thought, have appeared aukward in ode or rhyme; I have therefore preserved the blank verse.

ANTIGONE.

Thus Tantalus' unhappy daughter fell,
The Phrygian Niobe; high on the top
Of tow'ring Sipylus the rock enfolds her,
E'en as the ivy twines her tendrils round
The lofty oak, there still (as fame reports)
To melting show'rs and everlasting snow
Obvious she stands, her beauteous bosom wet
With tears, that from her ever-streaming eyes
Incessant flow; her fate resembles mine.

CHORUS.

A goddess she, and from a goddess sprung;
We are but mortal, and of mortals born:
To meet the fate of gods thus in thy life,
And in thy death, O! 'tis a glorious doom.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! thou mock'st me! why, whilst yet I live,
Would'st thou afflict me with reproach like this?
O! my dear country, and my dearer friends
Its blest inhabitants, renowned Thebes!
And ye Dircæan fountains, you I call
To witness, that I die by laws unjust,
To my deep prison unlamented go,
To my sad tomb, no fellow-suff'rer there
To soothe my woes, the living, or the dead.

CHORUS.

Rashness like thine must meet with such reward;
A father's crimes, I fear, lie heavy on thee.

ANTIGONE.

Oh! thou hast touch'd my worst of miseries!
My father's fate, the woes of all our house,
The wretched race of Labdacus, renown'd
For its misfortunes! O! the guilty bed

The Phrygian Niobe. The story of Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus, changed into a rock, is too well known to need any explanation. See Ovid's Met. b. 6.

Of those from whom I sprang; unhappy offspring
Of parents most unhappy! lo! to them
I go accurs'd; a virgin and a slave.
O! my poor brother! most unfortunate
Were thy sad nuptials; they have slain thy sister.

CHORUS.

Thy piety demands our praise; but know,
Authority is not to be despis'd;
'Twas thy own rashness brought destruction on thee.

ANTIGONE.

Thus friendless, unlamented, must I tread
The destin'd path, no longer to behold
Yon sacred light, and none shall mourn my fate.

SCENE V.

CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

Know ye not, slaves like her, to death devoted,
Wou'd never cease their wailings? wherefore is it
You thus delay to execute my orders?
Let her be carried instant to the cave,
And leave her there alone, to live, or die;
Her blood rests not on us; but she no longer
Shall breathe on earth. [*Exit* CREON.

SCENE VI.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

O! dreadful marriage bed!
O! my deep dungeon! my eternal home,

Thy sad nuptials. Polynices married the daughter of Adrastus, who, in defence of his son-in-law, led his Argians against Thebes: thus his marriage was the cause of his death, and the decree against Antigone consequent upon it.

Whither I go to join my kindred dead!
For not a few hath fell Persephone
Already ta'en; to her I go, the last
And most unhappy, ere my time was come;
But still I have sweet hope I shall not go
Unwelcome to my father, nor to thee,
My mother; dear to thee, Eteocles,
Still shall I ever be; these pious hands
Wash'd your pale bodies, and adorn'd you both
With rites sepulchral, and libations due:
And thus, my Polynices, for my care
Of thee am I rewarded, and the good
Alone shall praise me: for a husband dead,
Nor, had I been a mother, for my children
Wou'd I have dar'd to violate the laws;
Another husband and another child
Might soothe affliction; but, my parents dead,
A brother's loss cou'd never be repair'd,

A brother's loss, &c. Sophocles visibly alludes in this passage to the following story, told by Herodotus in his Thalia:

Darius suspecting that Intaphernes and his relations might raise a rebellion against him, caused him to be seized with his children and family; whilst they were under confinement, and bound in order to execution, the wife of Intaphernes went to the gates of the palace, weeping and lamenting loudly, which she continued so assiduously, that at last Darius, moved with compassion, sent a messenger to speak to her in these terms; "Woman, the king gives you the life of any one among "your relations who are prisoners, and leaves you the choice of the "person." "Since the king," said she, after some deliberation, "will grant "me no more than one, I choose my brother." Darius, when he heard her answer, wondering at her choice, dispatched another messenger, to ask her in his name, "why she had shewn so little regard to her husband "and children, and rather chose to save the life of her brother, "who was not so near related to her as her children, nor could be so "dear to her as her husband?" She answered, "that by the permission "of God, she might have another husband, and other children, if she "should be deprived of those she had; but could never have another "brother, because her father and mother were already dead." The king was so well pleased with this answer, that he not only pardoned her brother, but gave her likewise the life of her eldest son, and put all the rest to death. See Littlebury's Herodotus, v. 1, p. 318.

And therefore did I dare the vent'rous deed,
And therefore die by Creon's dread command.
Ne'er shall I taste of Hymen's joys, or know
A mother's pleasures in her infant race;
But, friendless and forlorn, alive descend
Into the dreary mansions of the dead:
And how have I offended the just gods!
But wherefore call on them! will they protect me,
When thus I meet with the reward of ill
For doing good? if this be just, ye gods,
If I am guilty let me suffer for it;
But if the crime be theirs, O! let them feel
That weight of mis'ry they have laid on me.

CHORUS.

The storm continues, and her angry soul
Still pours its sorrows forth.

SCENE VII.

CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

The slaves shall suffer
For this delay.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! death cannot be
Far from that voice.

CREON.

I wou'd not have thee hope
A moment's respite.

ANTIGONE.

O! my country's gods!
And thou, my native Thebes, I leave you now;
Look on me, princes, see the last of all
My royal race, see what I suffer, see
From whom I bear it, from the worst of men,
Only because I did delight in virtue. [*Exit* CREON.

SCENE VIII.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Remember what fair Danae endur'd,
Condemn'd to change heav'n's cheerful light
For scenes of horror and of night,
Within a brazen tow'r long time immur'd;
Yet was the maid of noblest race,
And honour'd e'en with Jove's embrace;
But, O! when fate decrees a mortal's woe,
Nought can reverse the doom, or stop the blow;
Nor heav'n above, nor earth and seas below.

ANTISTROPHE I.

The Thracian monarch, Dryas' hapless son,
Chain'd to a rock in torment lay,
And breath'd his angry soul away,
By wrath misguided, and by pride undone;

Remember what, &c. The Chorus, as dependants on Creon, could neither defend nor assist Antigone, they can only lament those misfortunes which it was not in their power to remove; they endeavour therefore to assuage her grief by the mention of other illustrious persons, whom they compare with her, not in their guilt, but in their sufferings.

Fair Danae. Acrisius, king of the Argives, having been warned by an oracle, that he should be slain by his grandson, shut up his daughter Danae in a brazen tower; Jupiter, however, according to the poets, gained access to her, by transforming himself into a golden shower. Horace has applied this fiction with his usual elegance. See Book 3. Od. 16.

The Thracian monarch. Lycurgus, king of Thrace, for contemning, or disturbing the rites of Bacchus, was, according to Sophocles, chained to a rock, where he perished. Homer punishes him with blindness. See the Iliad, B. 7. Some are of opinion that the fable took its rise from this monarch's virtuous regard for his people, who, seeing the ill effects of their intemperance in the use of wine, caused all the vines in his country to be rooted up and destroyed. Brumoy, by mistake, calls this Thracian monarch Orpheus, though he is both here and in Homer specified as the son of Dryas, and consequently can be no other than the Lycurgus abovementioned.

Taught by th' offended god to know
From foul reproach what evils flow;
For he the rites profan'd with sland'rous tongue,
The holy flame he quench'd, disturb'd the song,
And wak'd to wrath the Muses' tuneful throng.

STROPHE II.

His turbid waves where Salmydessus roll'd,
And proud Cyanea's rocks divide the flood,
There from thy temple, Mars, did'st thou behold
The sons of Phineus welt'ring in their blood;
A mother did the cruel deed,
A mother bade her children bleed;
Both, by her impious hand, depriv'd of light,
In vain lamented long their ravish'd sight,
And clos'd their eyes in never-ending night.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Long time they wept a better mother's fate,
Unhappy offspring of a luckless bed!
Yet nobly born, and eminently great
Was she, and midst sequester'd caverns bred;
Her father's angry storms among,
Daughter of gods, from Boreas sprung;
Equal in swiftness to the bounding steed,
She skim'd the mountains with a courser's speed,
Yet was the nymph to death and misery decreed.

[*Exeunt.*

Salmydessus, &c. Salmydessus was a river in Thrace, near which was a temple dedicated to Mars. The Cyaneæ were two rocks, or small islands near the Thracian Bosphorus.

The sons of Phineus. Plexippus and Pandion, whose eyes were put out by their step-mother Idæa, the wife of Phineus, after the death of their own mother Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyia, whose fate is alluded to in the latter part of the ode.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

TIRESIAS, GUIDE, CREON, CHORUS.

TIRESIAS.

PRINCES of Thebes, behold, conducted hither
By my kind guide, (such is the blind man's fate)
Tiresias comes.

CREON.

O! venerable prophet,
What hast thou to impart?

TIRESIAS.

I will inform thee;
Observe, and be obedient.

CREON.

Have I not
Been ever so?

TIRESIAS.

Thou hast; and therefore Thebes
Hath flourish'd still ——

CREON.

By thy protecting hand.

Princes of Thebes. The name Ἀναξ, or princes among the Greeks, was given not only to sovereigns, but frequently to the principal and most honourable members of the commonwealth: Tiresias, we see, compliments the antient citizens of Thebes, who composed the Chorus, with this title.

Observe, and be obedient. The prophet Tiresias is here introduced with great propriety; his appearance has something in it very solemn and affecting, his age and blindness adding a kind of melancholy dignity to the scene: the tyrant himself, we see, pays, at first, the utmost deference to his authority, and trembles at his power, though he afterwards treats him with contempt, and even accuses him of being corrupted by the friends of Antigone. This conduct of the poet is artful, as it raises the character of the prophet, and heightens his consequence, at the same time that it aggravates the guilt of Creon, by representing him as a contemner of the gods, and renders him a fitter object of divine vengeance.

TIRESIAS.

Therefore be wise; for know, this very hour
Is the important crisis of thy fate.

CREON.

Speak then, what is it? how I dread thy words!

TIRESIAS.

When thou hast heard the portents which my art
But now discover'd, thou wilt see it all.
Know then, that sitting on my antient throne
Augurial, whence each divination comes,
Sudden a strange unusual noise was heard
Of birds, whose loud and barb'rous dissonance
I knew not how t' interpret; by the sound
Of clashing wings, I cou'd discover well
That with their bloody claws they tore each other;
Amaz'd and fearful, instantly I tried
On burning altars holy sacrifice;
When, from the victim, lo! the sullen flame
Aspir'd not; smother'd in the ashes still
Laid the moist flesh, and, roll'd in smoke, repell'd
The rising fire, whilst from their fat the thighs

Of birds, &c. Divination by birds was in great esteem among the antients; the augurs were clothed in white, with a crown of gold upon their heads, and seated on a kind of throne, from whence, as the Scholiast informs us, they had power to assemble the birds from all quarters, whenever they had occasion for them. Tiresias does not tell us what birds they were that he heard fighting in the air, most probably vultures, as they feed only on carcases; these, and other birds of prey, were always supposed to foretell blood and slaughter.

From the victim, &c. Tiresias alarmed at the fighting of the birds, proceeds to the πυρομαντεια, or divination by fire of the sacrifice, which terrifies him with fresh omens; for, when the fire was kindled with difficulty, when the flame was divided, when it did not immediately spread itself over all the parts of the victim, but consumed them by degrees; when instead of ascending in a straight line, it whirled round, or was extinguished; when it cast forth a thick black smoke; when the μηρια, or thighs of the victim, parts appropriated more particularly to the gods, were not covered with fat, in order to consume them more quickly; all these were considered as marks of the divine displeasure, and infallible portents of future misery.

Were sep'rate; all these signs of deadly omen,
Boding dark vengeance, did I learn from him;
[*pointing to the* GUIDE.
He is my leader, king, and I am thine.
Then mark me well; from thee these evils flow,
From thy unjust decree; our altars all
Have been polluted by th' unhallow'd food
Of birds and dogs, that prey'd upon the corse
Of wretched Œdipus' unhappy son;
Nor will the gods accept our offer'd pray'rs,
Or from our hands receive the sacrifice;
No longer will the birds send forth their sounds
Auspicious, fatten'd thus with human blood.
Consider this, my son; and, O! remember,
To err is human; 'tis the common lot
Of frail mortality; and he alone
Is wise and happy, who, when ills are done,
Persists not, but wou'd heal the wound he made;
But self-sufficient obstinacy ever
Is folly's utmost height: where is the glory
To slay the slain, or persecute the dead?
I wish thee well, and therefore have spoke thus;
When those who love advise 'tis sweet to learn.

CREON.

I know, old man, I am the gen'ral mark,
The butt of all, and you all aim at me:
For me I know your prophecies were made,
And I am sold to this detested race;
Betray'd to them: but make your gains; go, purchase
Your Sardian amber, and your Indian gold;
They shall not buy a tomb for Polynices:
No, shou'd the eagle seek him for his food,
And tow'ring bear him to the throne of Jove,

Your Sardian amber. Sardis was a principal city of Lydia, near the river Pactolus, celebrated in the fables of antiquity for what it never had, sands of gold; Sophocles calls it ἤλεκτρον, or amber, probably on account of its transparency.

I wou'd not bury him; for well I know,
The gods by mortals cannot be polluted;
But the best men, by sordid gain corrupt,
Say all that's ill, and fall beneath the lowest.

TIRESIAS.

Who knows this, or who dare accuse us of it?

CREON.

What mean'st thou by that question? ask'st thou who?

TIRESIAS.

How far is wisdom beyond ev'ry good!

CREON.

As far as folly beyond ev'ry ill.

TIRESIAS.

That 's a distemper thou 'rt afflicted with.

CREON.

I'll not revile a prophet.

TIRESIAS.

But thou dost;
Thou 'lt not believe me.

CREON.

Your prophetic race
Are lovers all of gold.

TIRESIAS.

Tyrants are so,
Howe'er ill-gotten.

CREON.

Know'st thou 'tis a king
Thou 'rt talking thus to?

TIRESIAS.

Yes, I know it well;
A king, who owes to me his country's safety.

CREON.

Thou 'rt a wise prophet, but thou art unjust.

TIRESIAS.

Thou wilt oblige me then to utter that
Which I had purpos'd to conceal.

CREON.

Speak out,
Say what thou wilt, but say it not for hire.

TIRESIAS.

Thus may it seem to thee.

CREON.

But know, old man,
I am not to be sold.

TIRESIAS.

Remember this:
Not many days shall the bright sun perform
His stated course, ere, 'sprung from thy own loins,
Thyself shall yield a victim, in thy turn
Thou too shalt weep, for that thy cruel sentence
Decreed a guiltless virgin to the tomb,
And kept on earth, unmindful of the gods,
Ungrac'd, unburied, an unhallow'd corse,
Which not to thee, nor to the gods above
Of right belong'd; 'twas arbitrary pow'r:
But the avenging furies lie conceal'd,
The ministers of death have spread the snare,
And with like woes await to punish thee;
Do I say this from hopes of promis'd gold?
Pass but a little time, and thou shalt hear
The shrieks of men, the women's loud laments
O'er all thy palace; see th' offended people
Together rage; thy cities all by dogs
And beasts and birds polluted, and the stench
Of filth obscene on ev'ry altar laid.
Thus from my angry soul have I sent forth
Its keenest arrows (for thou hast provok'd me)
Nor shall they fly in vain, or thou escape

Nor to the gods above, &c. The heathen deities were divided into the superi, and the inferi, the gods above, and the gods below; to the latter of these the Θεοι νερτεροι, or, infernal powers, belonged the care of the dead, whom Creon had offended by refusing burial to the corpse of Polynices.

The destin'd blow: now, boy, conduct me home;
On younger heads the tempest of his rage
Shall fall; but, henceforth let him learn to speak
In humbler terms, and bear a better mind.

[*Exit* TIRESIAS.

SCENE II.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

He's gone, and dreadful were his prophecies;
Since these grey hairs were o'er my temples spread,
Nought from those lips hath flow'd but sacred truth.

CREON.

I know there hath not, and am troubled much
For the event: 'tis grating to submit,
And yet the mind spite of itself must yield
In such distress.

CHORUS.

Son of Menæceus, now
Thou need'st most counsel.

CREON.

What would'st thou advise?
I will obey thee.

CHORUS.

Set the virgin free,
And let a tomb be rais'd for Polynices.

CREON.

And dost thou counsel thus? and must I yield?

CHORUS.

Immediately, O king! for vengeance falls
With hasty footsteps on the guilty head.

CREON.

I cannot: yet I must reverse the sentence;
There is no struggling with necessity.

CHORUS.

Do it thyself, nor trust another hand.

CREON

I will; and you my servants, be prepar'd;
Each with his axe quick hasten to the place;
Myself, (for thus I have resolv'd) will go,
And the same hand that bound shall set her free;
For, O! I fear 'tis wisest still thro' life
To keep our antient laws, and follow virtue.

SCENE III.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Bacchus, by various names to mortals known,
Fair Semele's illustrious son,
Offspring of thunder-bearing Jove,
Who honour'st fam'd Italia with thy love!
Who dwell'st where erst the dragon's teeth were strew'd.
Or where Ismenus pours his gentle flood;
Who dost o'er Ceres' hallow'd rites preside,
And at thy native Thebes propitious still reside.

The same hand, &c. Creon, whose cruel nature was proof even against the remonstrances of paternal affection, is intimidated by the heavy judgements denounced against him by the prophet; he goes out with a design to stop the execution of his sentence against Antigone; this produces a new situation in the drama, and leaves the audience in suspense concerning the catastrophe.

Bacchus, by various names, &c. This Chorus may be considered as an image of the antient Greek tragedy, which in its first rude state was no more than what we here meet with, a hymn to Bacchus. The old men, affrighted at the predictions of Tiresias denouncing misery to Thebes, address themselves to that god as their tutelary deity: the whole ode is in the original to the last degree beautiful, and written with the true spirit and genius of antiquity.

Fair Semele's illustrious son, &c. Bacchus was generally reputed a Theban, and supposed by the poets to be the son of Jupiter, by Semele the daughter of Cadmus; he had several names, as Lyæus, Euius, Lenæus, Bromius, Eleleus, and many others. Italy is mentioned as his favourite country, on account of the number of vines growing there. He was worshipped together with Ceres in the Eleusinian mysteries.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where fam'd Parnassus' forked hills uprise,
To thee ascends the sacrifice;
Corycia's nymphs attend below,
Whilst from Castalia's fount fresh waters flow:
O'er Nysa's mountains wreaths of ivy twine,
And mix their tendrils with the clust'ring vine:
Around their master crowd the virgin throng,
And praise the god of Thebes in never-dying song.

STROPHE II.

Happiest of cities, Thebes! above the rest
By Semele and Bacchus blest!
O! visit now thy once belov'd abode,
O! heal our woes, thou kind protecting god!
From steep Parnassus, or th' Eubœan sea,
With smiles auspicious come, and bring with thee
Health, joy, and peace, and fair prosperity.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Immortal leader of the madd'ning choir,
Whose torches blaze with unextinguish'd fire,
Great son of Jove, who guid'st the tuneful throng,
Thou, who presidest o'er the nightly song,
Come with thy Naxian maids, a festive train,
Who, wild with joy, and raging o'er the plain,
For thee the dance prepare, to thee devote the strain.

[*Exeunt.*

Corycia's nymphs. The Muses, so called from Corycium at the foot of mount Parnassus.

Nysa's mountains. Parnassus is described by the poets as having two tops, one called Cirrha, sacred to Apollo,; the other Nysa, sacred to Bacchus: there was also a city in Arcadia of this name, where Bacchus was nursed.

Naxian maids. Naxos was one of the Cyclades, islands in the Archipelago, famous for its vines: of the nymphs of Naxos, called Thyades, or Mænades, it is reported that they ran wild and frantic about the woods, with each a torch or thyrsus in her hand, singing the praises of Bacchus; Sophocles calls them therefore μαινομεναι προσπολοι, 'the 'madd'ning choir.'

ACT V.

SCENE I.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

YE race of Cadmus, sons of antient Thebes,
Henceforth no state of human life by me
Shall be or valu'd or despis'd: for all
Depends on fortune; she exalts the low,
And casts the mighty down; the fate of men
Can never be foretold: there was a time
When Creon liv'd in envied happiness,
Rul'd o'er renowned Thebes, which from her foes
He had deliver'd, with successful pow'r;
Blest in his kingdom, in his children blest,
He stretch'd o'er all his universal sway;
Now all is gone: when pleasure is no more,
Man is but as an animated corse,
Nor can be said to live; he may be rich,
Or deck'd with regal honours; but if joy
Be absent from him, if he tastes them not,
'Tis useless grandeur all, and empty shade.

CHORUS.

Touching our royal master bring'st thou news
Of sorrow to us?

MESSENGER.

They are dead; and those,
Who live, the dreadful cause.

When pleasure is no more, &c. Athenæus will needs have it, that on this sentiment in Sophocles was founded the famous system of Epicurus, which places the summum bonum, or chief good, in the enjoyment of pleasure; but as he gives us no authority in support of this opinion, we are not obliged to subscribe to it.

They are dead. The most correct antient tragic writers, probably the better to preserve the unities, generally throw the principal circum-

CHORUS.

Quick, tell us who,
The slayer and the slain.

MESSENGER.

Hæmon is dead.

CHORUS.

Dead! by what hand, his father's or his own?

MESSENGER.

Enrag'd and grieving for his murder'd love
He slew himself.

CHORUS.

O! prophet, thy predictions
Were but too true!

MESSENGER.

Since thus it be, 'tis fit
We shou'd consult; our present state demands it.

CHORUS.

But see, Eurydice the wretched wife
Of Creon comes this way; or chance hath brought her,
Or Hæmon's hapless fate hath reach'd her ear.

SCENE II.

EURYDICE, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

EURYDICE.

O! citizens, as to Minerva's fane

stances of the catastrophe into narration; the moderns, for reasons sufficiently obvious, bring the whole into action; much may be said in defence of the methods used by both. Leaving this question therefore to be determined by the critics, I shall only add, that in regard to the denouement of the Antigone, nothing can be more simple, or natural; the consequence of Creon's cruelty, and his too late repentance, brings on the death of Antigone, Hæmon, and Eurydice. Poetical justice is strictly observed: the unfortunate Creon suffers as a king, as a husband, and as a father; and in spite of all his crimes becomes an object of compassion. Thus terror and pity are both effectually raised, the one by his exemplary punishment, and the other by his unparallelled misfortunes.

O! citizens, &c. As the queen is going out to the temple of Minerva, she opens the door, and overhears the Messenger relating to the Chorus

E'en now I went to pay my vows, the doors
I burst, and heard imperfectly the sound
Of most disastrous news which touch'd me near,
Breathless I fell amidst the virgin throng,
And now I come to know the dreadful truth;
Whate'er it be, I'll hear it now; for O!
I am no stranger to calamity.

MESSENGER.

Then mark, my mistress, I will tell thee all,
Nor will I pass a circumstance unmention'd.
Shou'd I deceive thee with an idle tale
'Twere soon discover'd; truth is always best.
Know then, I follow'd Creon to the field,
Where torn by dogs the wretched carcase lay
Of Polynices, (first to Proserpine
And angry Pluto, to appease their wrath,
Our humble pray'rs addressing) there we lav'd
In the pure stream the body, then with leaves
Fresh gather'd cov'ring burnt his poor remains;
And on the neighb'ring turf a tomb uprais'd;
Then tow'rds the virgin's rocky cave advanc'd,
When from the dreadful chamber a sad cry
As from afar was heard, a servant ran
To tell the king, and still as we approach'd,
The sound of sorrow from a voice unknown
And undistinguish'd issued forth. Alas!
Said Creon, am I then a faithful prophet?
And do I tread a more unhappy path
Than e'er I went before? It is my son,
I know his voice: but get ye to the door,
My servants, close, look thro' the stony heap,
Mark if it be so; is it Hæmon's voice,

the death of Hæmon; she faints at the news, and as soon as recovered enters with impatience to know the truth of it. Sophocles never brings his characters on the stage without some preparation and a reason for their appearance there; conduct, which I would recommend to our modern dramatic writers for their imitation.

Again he cried, or have the gods deceiv'd me?
Thus spoke the king: we, to our mournful lord
Obedient, look'd, and saw Antigone
Down in the deepest hollow of the cave
By her own vestments hung; close by her side
The wretched youth embracing in his arms
Her lifeless corse, weeping his father's crime,
His ravish'd bride, and horrid nuptial bed,
Creon beheld, and loud approaching cried,
What art thou doing? what's thy dreadful purpose?
What means my son? come forth, my Hæmon, come,
Thy father begs thee; with indignant eye
The youth look'd up, nor scornful deign'd an answer,
But silent drew his sword, and with fell rage
Struck at his father, who by flight escap'd
The blow, then on himself bent all his wrath,
Full in his side the weapon fix'd, but still,
Whilst life remain'd, on the soft bosom hung
Of the dear maid, and his lost spirit breath'd
O'er her pale cheek discolour'd with his blood.
Thus lay the wretched pair in death united,
And celebrate their nuptials in the tomb.
To future times a terrible example
Of the sad woes which rashness ever brings.

[*Exit* EURYDICE.

SCENE III.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

What can this mean? she's gone, without a word.

Whilst life remain'd, &c. The death of the two lovers is finely described, and the circumstances of it remarkably natural and affecting. I doubt whether Otway himself, with all his tenderness, could have drawn a more striking picture.

She's gone, &c. The silence and departure of Eurydice, on hearing the news of her son's death, are extremely judicious, and more expressive of her feelings on the occasion than words could possibly have

MESSENGER.

'Tis strange, and yet I trust she will not loud
Proclaim her griefs to all, but, for I know
She's ever prudent, with her virgin train
In secret weep her murder'd Hæmon's fate.

CHORUS.

Clamour indeed were vain; but such deep silence
Doth ever threaten horrid consequence.

MESSENGER.

Within we soon shall know if aught she hide
Of deadly purport in her angry soul;
For well thou say'st her silence is most dreadful.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

CHORUS.

But lo! the king himself, and in his arms
See his dead son, the monument accurs'd
Of his sad fate, which, may we say unblamed,
Sprang not from others guilt but from his own.

SCENE IV.

CREON, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

(CREON *enters, bearing the Body of* HÆMON.)

CREON.

Ah me! what deadly woes from the bad mind
Perpetual flow; thus in one wretched house

made it, "curæ leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent." When Œdipus is discovered to be the murderer of his father, Jocasta acts in the same manner. A modern writer would perhaps have lengthened out this scene with complaints and declamation; but Sophocles (to speak in the language of Shakespear) never o'ersteps the modesty of nature; his faithful mirror reflects all her features, without magnifying, diminishing, or distorting them.

In his arms, &c. It is plain from these words, which are literally translated from the original, that Creon enters bearing the body of his dead son. Sophocles, we may imagine, thought it would heighten the distress. Shakespear was of the same opinion, and brings in Lear with Cordelia in his arms; though in Tate's alteration of it, which is always ridiculously followed in the representation, this circumstance is omitted.

Have you beheld the slayer and the slain!
O fatal counsels! O unhappy son!
Thus with thy youthful bride to sink in death;
Thou diest, my child, and I alone have kill'd thee.

CHORUS.

O king, thy justice comes too late.

CREON.

It doth,
I know it well, unhappy as I am;
For O! the god this heavy weight of woe
Hath cast upon me, and his fiercest wrath
Torments me now, changing my joyful state
To keenest anguish; O! the fruitless toils
Of wretched mortals!

SCENE V.

MESSENGER, CREON, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

Thus oppress'd, my lord,
With bitterest misfortune, more affliction
Awaits thee still, which thou wilt find within.

CREON.

And can there be more woes? is aught to come
More horrible than this?

MESSENGER.

The queen is dead;
Her wounds yet fresh, eager, alas! to shew
A mother's love, she follow'd her lost child.

CREON.

O death insatiate! how dost thou afflict me!
What cruel news, thou messenger of ill,
Hast thou brought now?

CHORUS.

A wretch, already dead
With grief, thy horrid tale once more hath slain.

CREON.

Didst thou not say a fresh calamity
Had fall'n upon me? didst thou not say my wife
Was dead, alas! for grief of Hæmon's fate?

[*Scene opens and discovers the body of* EURYDICE.

MESSENGER.

Behold her there.

CREON.

O me! another blow!
What now remains? what can I suffer more,
Thus bearing in these arms my breathless son?
My wife too dead! O! most unhappy mother!
And O! thou wretched child!

MESSENGER.

Close by the altar
She drew the sword, and clos'd her eyes in death,
Lamenting first her lost Megareus' fate
And Hæmon's death, with imprecations dire
Still pour'd on thee, the murd'rer of thy son.

CREON.

I shudder at it: will no friendly hand
Destroy me quickly? for O! I am most wretched;
Beset with mis'ries!

MESSENGER.

She accus'd thee oft,
And said the guilt of both their deaths was thine.

CREON.

Alas! I only am to blame; 'twas I
Who kill'd thee, Hæmon; I confess my crime;
Bear me, my servants, bear me far from hence
For I am —— nothing.

CHORUS.

If in ills like these
Aught can be well, thou hast determin'd right:
When least we see our woes, we feel them least.

Megareus' fate. Megareus was the first husband of Eurydice.

CREON.

Quick let my last my happiest hour appear;
Wou'd it were come, the period of my woes!
O! that I might not see another day!

CHORUS.

Time must determine that: the present hour
Demands our care; the rest be left to heav'n.

CREON.

But I have wish'd and pray'd for't.

CHORUS.

Pray for nothing;
There's no reversing the decrees of fate.

CREON.

Take hence this useless load, this guilty wretch
Who slew his child, who slew e'en thee, my wife;
I know not whither to betake me, where
To turn my eyes, for all is dreadful round me,
And fate hath weigh'd me down on every side.

CHORUS.

Wisdom alone is man's true happiness;
We are not to dispute the will of heav'n;
For ever are the boastings of the proud
By the just gods repaid, and man at last
Is taught to fear their anger, and be wise.

And man, &c. This moral reflection, naturally arising from the action of the drama, concludes the tragedy of Antigone; a piece, which for the conduct of its plot, the justness of its characters, and the propriety of its sentiments and expressions cannot be too much admired. That simplicity, and want of incidents, which modern critics may condemn, were probably among those beauties which recommended it to the favour of antiquity: it met with remarkable success on the Athenian stage, having been represented there (according to Aristophanes the grammarian) two and thirty times, and was looked an as so considerable a testimony of the author's merit, as to procure for him in reward the government of Samos.

TRACHINIÆ.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HERCULES.

HYLLUS, Son of Hercules.

DEIANIRA, Wife of Hercules.

LICHAS, a Herald.

ATTENDANT on Deianira.

NURSE.

OLD MAN.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, composed of Virgins of Trachis.

SCENE—BEFORE THE PALACE OF CEYX IN TRACHIS.

TRACHINIÆ.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT.

DEIANIRA.

Of antient fame, and long for truth receiv'd,
Hath been the maxim, that nor good nor ill
Can mortal life be call'd before we die;
Alas! it is not so; for, O! my friends,
Ere to the shades of Orcus I descend,
Too well I know that Deianira's life
Hath ever been, and ever must be wretched:
Whilst in my native Pleuron Æneus watch'd
My tender years with kind paternal care,
If ever woman suffer'd from the dread
Of hated nuptials, I endur'd the worst

Trachiniae. The titles of the antient tragedies were usually given them either from the persons concerned, the business of the drama, or the place where it was transacted: the Trachiniæ is so called from Trachis, a small country of Phthiotis in Thessaly: to this place, Deianira had accompanied Hercules in his voluntary banishment, and remained under the protection of Ceyx the king, during the absence of her husband on his expedition to Œchalia.

Nor good, nor ill, &c. This observation is generally attributed to Solon, who lived long after Deianira; Sophocles is therefore here accused of an anachronism; but as the remark is no less obvious than true, we need not be surprised to find it quoted as proverbial, even in the earliest ages.

Pleuron. A city of Ætolia, and the residence of Æneus, king of that country, and father of Deianira.

And bitt'rest woes, when Achelous came,
The river-god, to ask a father's voice
And snatch'd me to his arms; with triple form
He came affrighting; now, to sight appear'd
A bull, and now with motley scales adorn'd
A wreathed serpent, now with human shape
And bestial head united; from his beard,
Shadow'd with hair, as from a fountain, drip'd
The ever-flowing water; horrid form!
This to escape, my pray'rs incessant rose,
That I might rather die than e'er approach
His hated bed, when lo! the welcome hour,
Tho' late, arriv'd, that brought the son of Jove
And fair Alcmena to my aid; he came,
He fought, be free'd me; how the battle pass'd
Who unconcern'd beheld it best can tell;
Alas! I saw it not, oppress'd with fear,
Lest from my fatal beauty shou'd arise
Some sad event; at length, deciding Jove
Gave to the douhtful fight a happy end,
If I may call it so; for, since the hour
That gave me to Alcides' wish'd-for bed,
Fears rise on fears; still is my anxious heart
Solicitous for him; oft'times the night,

Achelous. A famous river, arising out of mount Pindus, and dividing Ætolia from Acarnania; the fabulous account of his person and power, is received by the antient poets, and explained by the mythologists; for a full detail of this extraordinary courtship, the reader may turn to the instructive Ovid. See Met. b. 9.

Oft'times the night, &c. Ovid had probably this passage of Sophocles before him, when he wrote the following lines in his epistle from Deianira to Hercules:

Vir mihi semper abest, & conjuge notior hospes,
Monstraque, terribiles persequiturque feras;
Ipsa domo vacua votis operata pudicis
Torqueor, infesto ne vir ab hoste cadat;
Inter serpentes, aprosque avoidosque leones
Jactor, & esuros terna per ora canes.

See Ep. 9.

Which brings him to me, bears him from my arms
To other labours, and a second toil:
Our children too, alas! he sees them not,
But as the husbandman who ne'er beholds
His distant lands, save at the needful time
Of seed or harvest; wand'ring thus, and thus
Returning ever, is he sent to serve
I know not whom; when crown'd with victory,
Then most my fears prevail; for since he slew
The valiant Iphitus, at Trachis here
We live in exile with our gen'rous friend,
The hospitable Ceyx; he mean-time

I know not whom. Probably Eurystheus, king of Mycenae.

——— Duros mille labores
Rege sub Eurystheo, fatis Junonis iniquæ,
Pertulit. VIRG. Æn. 7.

The Fates having, it seems, decreed before the birth of Hercules and Eurystheus, that the first-born of them should rule over the other, the implacable Juno, who was resolved to revenge the infidelity of Jupiter on his offspring, contrived (no very difficult matter indeed for the goddess of child-birth) to bring Eurystheus into the world first, who accordingly took the lead, made use of his privilege, and imposed on the noble Hercules what tasks he thought proper: for an account of his most distinguished labours, my readers may turn to the faithful Chronicles of Ovid. See Met. b. 9.

Since he slew, &c. Iphitus (as the story is told by Homer, in the Odyssey) was the son of Eurytus, and slain by Hercules, who, being a guest at his court, broke through the laws of hospitality, and murdered the young prince, in order to possess himself of some beautiful mares, which, after the commission of this fact, he took away with him: Sophocles (as we shall find in the second act) has varied this circumstance.

According to Brumoy, who takes it from the commentators, the person slain by Hercules was a young man, a relation of Æneus, our hero's father-in-law; the murder was by a casual blow, and unpremeditated: Hercules notwithstanding, according to the custom of his country, submitted to a voluntary banishment for one year, having conducted Deianira and his family to Trachis, and committed them to the care of Ceyx, as mentioned by Hesiod:

——— Τρηχινα δε τοι πεμψελαυνων
——— Ες κτυπα ανακτα ———

Is gone, and none can tell me where; he went
And left me most unhappy; O! some ill
Hath sure befall'n him! for no little time
Hath he been absent; 'tis full fifteen moons
Since I beheld him, and no messenger
Is come to Deianira; some misfortune
Doubtless hath happen'd, for he left behind
A dreadful scroll: O! I have pray'd the gods
A thousand times it may contain no ill.

ATTENDANT.

My royal mistress, long have I beheld
Thy tears and sorrows for thy lost Alcides;
But if the counsels of a slave might claim
Attention, I wou'd speak, wou'd ask thee wherefore
Amongst thy sons, a num'rous progeny,
None hath been sent in search of him, and chief
Thy Hyllus, if he holds a father's health
And safety dear: but, e'en as we cou'd wish,
Behold him here, if what I have advis'd
Seem fitting, he is come in happiest hour
To execute our purpose.

SCENE II.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT.

DEIANIRA.

O! my son,
Oft from the meanest tongue the words of truth
And safety flow; this woman, tho' a slave,
Hath spoke what wou'd have well become the mouth
Of freedom's self to utter.

My royal mistress, &c. The first introduction of confidantes on the stage has by some been attributed to the French writers; the scene before us is, however, a proof that it is of much more antient original: in the moderns it is perhaps more excusable, because the Chorus of the Greeks seems to have rendered it altogether unnecessary.

HYLLUS.

May I know
What she hath said?

DEIANIRA.

She says it doth reflect
Disgrace on thee, thy father so long absent,
Not to have gain'd some knowledge of his fate.

HYLLUS.

I have already, if I may rely
On what report hath said of him.

DEIANIRA.

O! where,
Where is he then, my son?

HYLLUS.

These twelve months past,
If fame say true, a Lydian woman held him
In shameful servitude.

DEIANIRA.

If it be so,
May ev'ry tongue reproach him!

HYLLUS.

But I hear
He now is free.

DEIANIRA.

And where doth rumour say
He is? alive or dead?

HYLLUS.

'Tis said, he leads
Or means to lead his forces tow'rds Eubœa,
The land of Eurytus.

DEIANIRA.

Alas! my son,
Dost thou not know the oracles he left
Touching that kingdom?

HYLLUS.

No, I know not of them;
What were they?

DEIANIRA.

There, he said, or he shou'd die,
Or, if he shou'd survive, his life to come
Wou'd all be happy: wilt thou not, my son,
In this important crisis strive to aid
Thy father? if he lives, we too shall live
In safety: if he dies, we perish with him.

HYLLUS.

Mother, I go; long since I had been there
But that the oracle did never reach
Mine ears before; mean-time that happy fate,
Which on my father ever wont to smile
Propitious, shou'd not suffer us to fear;
Thus far inform'd, I will not let the means
Of truth escape me, but will know it all.

DEIANIRA.

Haste then away, my son, and know, good deeds
Tho' late perform'd are crown'd with sure success.

SCENE III.

CHORUS, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT.

STROPHE I.

On thee we call, great god of day,
To whom the night, with all her starry train,
Yields her solitary reign,
To send us some propitious ray:
Say thou, whose all-beholding eye
Doth nature's ev'ry parts descry,
What dang'rous ocean, or what land unknown
From Deianira keeps Alcmena's valiant son.

On thee we call, &c. This is the first appearance of the Chorus, composed most properly of the principal virgins of Trachis, who come in to condole with the afflicted Deianira, and offer up a beautiful address to Apollo, in which are intermixed, according to the custom of the antients, moral reflections on the instability of human affairs. The whole song naturally arises from the circumstances of the drama, and is, according to Horace's rule, of a piece with the business of it.

ANTISTROPHE I.

For she nor joy nor comfort knows,
But weeps her absent lord, and vainly tries
To close her ever-streaming eyes,
Or soothe her sorrows to repose:
Like the sad bird of night, alone
She makes her solitary moan;
And still, as on her widow'd bed reclin'd
She lies, unnumber'd fears perplex her anxious mind.

STROPHE II.

E'en as the troubled billows roar,
When angry Boreas rules th' inclement skies,
And waves on waves tumultuous rise
To lash the Cretan shore:
Thus sorrows still on sorrows prest,
Fill the great Alcides' breast;
Unfading yet shall his fair virtues bloom,
And some protecting god preserve him from the tomb.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Wherefore, to better thoughts inclin'd
Let us with hope's fair prospect fill thy breast,
Calm thy anxious thoughts to rest,
And ease thy troubled mind:
No bliss on man, unmix'd with woe,
Doth Jove, great lord of all, bestow;
But good with ill, and pleasure still with pain,
Like heaven's revolving signs, alternate reign.

EPODE.

Not always do the shades of night remain,
Nor ever with hard fate is man oppress'd;
The wealth that leaves us may return again,
Sorrow and joy successive fill the breast;
Fearless then of every ill,
Let cheerful hope support thee still:
Remember, queen, there is a pow'r above;
And when did the great father, careful Jove,
Forget his children dear, and kind paternal love?

DEIANIRA.

The fame, it seems, of Deianira's woes
Hath reach'd thine ears, but, O! thou little know'st
What I have suffer'd; thou hast never felt
Sorrows like mine; and long may be the time
Ere sad experience shall afflict thy soul
With equal woes! alas! the youthful maid
In flow'ry pastures still exulting feeds,
Nor feels the scorching sun, the wint'ry storm,
Or blast of angry winds; secure she leads
A life of pleasure, void of ev'ry care,
Till to the virgin's happy state succeeds
The name of wife; then shall her portion come
Of pain and anguish, then her terrors rise
For husband and for children; then perchance
You too may know what 'tis to be unhappy,
And judge of my misfortunes by your own.
Long since oppress'd by many a bitter woe,
Oft have I wept, but this transcends them all;
For I will tell thee, when Alcides last
Forth on his journey went, he left behind
An antient scroll; alas! before that time
In all his labours he did never use
To speak as one who thought of death, secure
Always he seem'd of victory, but now
This writing marks as if he were to die,
The portion out reserv'd for me, and wills
His children to divide th' inheritance;
Fixes the time, in fifteen moons, it says,
He shou'd return; that past, or he must perish,
Or, if he 'scape the fatal hour, thenceforth
Shou'd lead a life of happiness and joy:
Thus had the gods, it said, decreed, his life

The youthful maid, &c. Horace has caught this image:

Quæ velut latis equa trima campis,
Ludit exultim, metuitque tangi,
Nuptiarum expers. B. 3. Od. 11.

And toils shou'd end; so from their antient beach
Dodona's doves foretold: th' appointed hour
Approaches that must bring th' event, e'en now,
My friends, and therefore nightly do I start
From my sweet slumbers, struck with deadly fear,
Lest I shou'd lose the dearest best of men.

CHORUS.

Of better omen be thy words; behold
A messenger, who bears (for on his brow
I see the laurel crown) some joyful news.

SCENE IV.

MESSENGER, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

I come, my royal mistress, to remove
Thy fears, and bring the first glad tidings to thee,
To tell thee that Alcmena's son returns
With life and victory; e'en now he comes
To lay before his country's gods the spoils
Of glorious war.

DEIANIRA.

What dost thou say, old man?
What dost thou tell me?

Dodona's doves. At Dodona, a city of Chaonia in Epirus, was a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dodoneus, and in a grove near it a beach-tree, on which two doves sat and prophesied: the Scholiast, in this place, turns the doves into old women, because the word πελειαι is not far from πολιαι, and therefore may signify grey: the opinion of Eustathius is rather more rational, who supposes these doves to have been priestesses of Jupiter, and so called, because they made their predictions by the observation of those birds; a much better conceit than that of Herodotus, who very gravely assures us, that the old women were called doves, because their language was barbarous, and as unintelligible as that of birds; and for the same reason they might as well have been called partridges or quails.

MESSENGER.

That thy dear Alcides,
Thy valiant lord, with his victorious bands,
Will soon attend thee.

DEIANIRA.

From our citizens
Didst thou learn this, or from a stranger's tongue?

MESSENGER.

The herald Lichas, in yon flow'ry vale,
But now reported, and I fled impatient
Soon as I heard it, that I first might tell thee
And be rewarded for the welcome tale.

DEIANIRA.

But wherefore tarries Lichas, if he bring
Glad tidings to me?

MESSENGER.

'Tis impossible
To reach thee, for the Melian people throng
Around him, not a man but longs to know
Some news of thy Alcides, stops his journey,
Nor will release him till he hear it all;
Spite of himself he waits to satisfy
Their eager doubts; but thou wilt see him soon.

DEIANIRA.

O! thou, who dwell'st on Œta's sacred top,
Immortal Jove! at length, tho' late, thou giv'st
The wish'd-for boon; let ev'ry female now,
You that within the palace do reside,
And you, my followers here, with shouts proclaim
The blest event! for, lo! a beam of joy,
I little hop'd, breaks forth, and we are happy.

STROPHE.

Quick let sounds of mirth and joy
Ev'ry cheerful hour employ;

Quick let sounds, &c. This second song of the Chorus is a hymn of thanksgiving to Apollo and Diana. Deianira, on the agreeable news of

Haste, and join the festive song,
You, who lead the youthful throng,
On whom the smiles of prosp'rous fate,
And Hymen's promis'd pleasures wait,
Now all your Io Pæans sing,
To Phœbus, your protector and your king.

ANTISTROPHE.

And you, ye virgin train, attend,
Not unmindful of your friend,
His sister huntress of the groves,
Who still her native Delos loves,
Prepare the dance, and choral lays,
To hymn the chaste Diana's praise;
To her, and her attendant choir,
Of mountain-nymphs, attune the votive lyre.

EPODE.

Already hath the god possess'd
My soul, and rules the sov'reign of my breast;
Evoë, Bacchus! Io! I come to join
Thy throng; around me doth the thyrsus twine,
And I am fill'd with rage divine;
See! the glad messenger appears
To calm thy doubts, and to remove thy fears;
Let us our Io Pæans sing
To Phœbus, our protector and our king.

her husband's arrival, calls together her friends and servants to partake of her happiness; it was probably accompanied both with music and dancing, ad tibiam, says Camerarius, choream agitatam apparet; I have endeavoured to adapt the English measure to the festivity of the subject; those who contend for the division into acts as parted by the songs of the Chorus will please to remember this is the second intermede.

Sov'reign of my breast. Almost a literal translation of ' Τυραν' ἐμας ' ψυχης,' ' tyrant of my soul;' an expression which carries with it a remarkably modern air, and much in the style of our dramatic lovers.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

These eyes deceive me, friends, or I behold
A crowd approach this way, and with them comes
The herald Lichas: let me welcome him,
If he bring joyful news.

SCENE II.

LICHAS, IOLE, SLAVES, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

LICHAS.

My royal mistress,
We greet thee with fair tidings of success,
And therefore shall our words deserve thy praise.

DEIANIRA.

O! thou dear messenger, inform me first
What first I wish to know, my lov'd Alcides,
Doth he yet live, shall I again behold him?

LICHAS.

I left him well; in health and manly strength
Exulting.

DEIANIRA.

Where? in his own native land,
Or 'midst Barbarians?

LICHAS.

On Eubœa's shore
He waits, with various fruits to crown the altar,
And pay due honours to Cenæan Jove.

Cenæan Jove. So called from Cenæum, a promontory in Eubœa, where altars were raised, and sacrifices offered up to him. The heathens, after victory, never omitted paying their grateful acknowledge-

DEIANIRA.

Commanded by some oracle divine
Performs he this, or means but to fulfill
A vow of gratitude for conquest gain'd?

LICHAS.

For vict'ry o'er the land, whence we have brought
These captive women, whom thou see'st before thee.

DEIANIRA.

Whence come the wretched slaves? for if I judge
Their state aright, they must indeed be wretched.

LICHAS.

Know, when Alcides had laid waste the city
Of Eurytus, to him and to the gods
Were these devoted.

DEIANIRA.

In Œchalia then
Hath my Alcides been this long long time?

LICHAS.

Not so: in Lydia, (as himself reports)
Was he detain'd a slave; so Jove ordain'd;
And who shall blame the high decrees of Jove?
Sold to barbarian Omphale, he serv'd
Twelve tedious months; ill brook'd he the foul shame;
Then in his wrath he made a solemn vow
He wou'd revenge the wrong on the base author,

ments to the Supreme Power: though mistaken in the object of their worship, they are, perhaps, not unworthy of our imitation in their punctual and devout performance of it.

Omphale. A queen of Lydia. Hercules, who, like many other heroes, was a dupe to women, became so enamoured of her as to submit to every task which she thought proper to impose on him; she found him a willing slave and treated him accordingly, put a distaff in his hands, and sent him to spin with her maids. This fact, according to general tradition, was prior to his marriage with Deianara: Sophocles, however, has taken the poetical liberty to change the time; as most agreeable to his purpose. Lichas softens the matter to Deianara, and makes it an involuntary servitude; though he well knew that his master had in reality sold himself. He calls her Barbarian Omphale, because the Greeks looked on all nations but themselves as such.

And bind in chains his wife and all his race:
Nor fruitless the resolve, for when the year
Of slav'ry past had expiated the crime
Imputed, soon with gather'd force he march'd
'Gainst the devoted Eurytus, the cause
(For so he deem'd him) of those hateful bonds;
Within his palace he had erst receiv'd
Alcides, but with bitt'rest taunts revil'd him,
Boasting, in spite of his all-conqu'ring arrows,
His son's superior skill, and said, a slave
Like him shou'd bend beneath a freeman's pow'r;
Then 'midst the banquet's mirth, enflam'd with wine,
Cast forth his antient guest; this to revenge
When Iphitus to search his pastur'd steeds
Came to Tyrinthia, Hercules surpris'd,
And, as he turn'd his wand'ring eyes aside,
Hurl'd headlong from the mountain's top; great Jove,
Father of men, from high Olympus saw
And disapprov'd the deed, unworthy him
Who ne'er before by fraud destroy'd his foes;
With open force had he reveng'd the wrong,
Jove had forgiv'n, but violence conceal'd
The gods abhor, and therefore was he sold
To slav'ry; Eurytus' unhappy sons
Were punish'd too, and dwell in Erebus;
Their city is destroy'd, and they, whom here
Thou see'st, from freedom and prosperity,
Reduc'd to wretchedness; to thee they come,
Such was Alcides' will; which I, his slave,
Have faithfully perform'd; himself ere long
Thou shalt behold, when to paternal Jove
He hath fulfill'd his vows: thus my long tale

Hurl'd headlong, &c. 'It is surprising (says Brumoy) that Sophocles should impute such an action to his hero, even in an account that is afterwards found to be fictitious.' But the French critic forgets that he had a foundation for this story in Homer, as we observed in a former note.

Ends with the welcom'st news which thou could'st hear,
Alcides comes.

CHORUS.

O! queen, thy happiness
Is great indeed, to see these slaves before thee,
And know thy lord approaches.

DEIANIRA.

I am happy:
To see my Hercules with vict'ry crown'd
'Tis fit I shou'd rejoice; and yet, my friends,
If we consider well, we still shou'd fear
For the successful, lest they fall from bliss.
It moves my pity much when I behold
These wretched captives in a foreign land
Without a parent, and without a home,
Thus doom'd to slav'ry here, who once perhaps,
Enjoy'd fair freedom's best inheritance:
O Jove! averter of each mortal ill,
Let not my children ever feel thy arm
Thus rais'd against them! or, if 'tis decreed,
Let it not be whilst Deianira lives:
The sight of these alarms my fears: but tell me
Thou poor afflicted captive, who thou art? [*to* IOLE.
Art thou a mother? or, as by thy years
Thou seem'st, a virgin, and of noble birth?
Canst not thou tell me, Lichas, whence she sprang?
Inform me, for, of all these slaves, she most
Hath won my pity, and in her alone
Have I observ'd a firm and gen'rous mind.

LICHAS.

Why ask of me? I know not who she is;
Perhaps of no mean rank.

DEIANIRA.

The royal race
Of Eurytus?

LICHAS.

I know not, nor did e'er
Inquire.

DEIANIRA.

And did'st thou never hear her name
From her companions?

LICHAS.

Never. I perform'd
My work in silence.

DEIANIRA.

Tell me then thyself,
Thou wretched maid, for I am most unhappy
Till I know who thou art.

LICHAS.

She will not speak;
I know she will not; not a word hath past
Her lips, e'er since she left her native land,
But still in tears the hapless virgin mourns
The burthen of her sad calamity;
Her fate is hard: she merits your forgiveness.

DEIANIRA.

Let her go in: I'll not disturb her peace,
Nor wou'd I heap fresh sorrows on her head,
She hath enough already: we'll retire.
Go where thou wilt; my cares within await me. [*to* IOLE.

[*Exeunt* LICHAS, IOLE, *and* SLAVES.

SCENE III.

MESSENGER, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

Stay thee awhile. I have a tale to tell
Touching these captives, which imports thee nearly,

She will not speak. Nothing can be better imagined, or more artfully contrived, than the concern which Deianira expresses for Iole: the youth, beauty, and modesty of the fair captive plead strongly in her behalf, and the queen is, as it were, enamoured of her rival. She is anxious to know who and what she is; but Iole, whose business it was to conceal herself, remains silent. Cassandra behaves in the same manner with regard to Clytemnestra, in the Agamemnon of Æschylus.

Stay thee awhile. This is the same Messenger who appeared in the first act to announce the arrival of Lichas: he is moved by the unhappy

And I alone am able to inform thee.

DEIANIRA.

What dost thou know? and why would'st thou detain me?

MESSENGER.

Return, and hear me; when I spake before
I did not speak in vain, nor shall I now.

DEIANIRA.

Would'st thou I call them back, or mean'st to tell
Thy secret purpose here to me alone?

MESSENGER.

To thee, and these thy friends, no more.

DEIANIRA.

They're gone;
Now speak in safety.

MESSENGER.

Lichas is dishonest,
And either now, or when I saw him last
Hath utter'd falsehood.

DEIANARA.

Ha! what dost thou say?
I understand thee not, explain it quickly.

MESSENGER.

I heard him say, before attendant crowds,
It was this virgin, this fair slave destroy'd
Œchalia's lofty tow'rs, 'twas love alone
That wag'd the war, no Lydian servitude,
Nor Omphale, nor the pretended fall
Of Iphytus (for so the tale he brings
Wou'd fain persuade thee) know thy own Alcides,
For that he cou'd not gain th' assenting voice
Of Eurytus to his unlawful love,
Laid waste the city where her father reign'd,
And slew him; now the daughter, as a slave,
Is sent to thee; the reason is too plain,

situation of Deianira, and stops her, as she is going out, to disclose the secret to her, and acquaint her with the treachery of Lichas.

Nor think he meant her for a slave alone,
The maid he loves, that wou'd be strange indeed;
My royal mistress, most unwillingly
Do I report th' unwelcome news, but thought
It was my duty: I have told the truth,
And the Trachinians bear me witness of it.

DEIANIRA.

Wretch that I am! to what am I reserv'd?
What hidden pestilence within my roof
Have I receiv'd unknowing! hapless woman!
She seem'd of beauteous form and noble birth;
Have you not heard her name? for Lichas said
He knew it not.

MESSENGER.

Daughter of Eurytus,
Her name Iole; he had not enquir'd
Touching her race.

CHORUS.

Perdition on the man,
Of all most wicked, who hath thus deceiv'd thee.

DEIANIRA.

What's to be done, my friend? this dreadful news
Afflicts me sorely.

CHORUS.

Go, and learn the whole
From his own lips, compel him to declare
The truth.

DEIANIRA.

I will; thou counsel'st me aright.

CHORUS.

Shall we attend you?

DEIANIRA.

No; for see he comes,
Uncall'd.

Perdition on the man, &c. The Chorus here throws an oblique reflection on Hercules for his falsehood to Deianira; though it is so worded, probably with a purposed ambiguity, as to be applicable to the herald Lichas.

SCENE IV.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

LICHAS.

O! queen, what are thy last commands
To thy Alcides? for e'en now I go
To meet him.

DEIANIRA.

Hast thou ta'en so long a journey
To Trachis, and would'st now so soon return,
Ere I can hold some further converse with thee?

LICHAS.

If thou would'st question me of aught, behold me
Ready to tell thee.

DEIANIRA.

Wilt thou tell me truth?

LICHAS.

In all I know; so bear me witness, Jove!

DEIANIRA.

Who is that woman thou hast brought?

LICHAS.

I hear
She's of Eubœa; for her race and name
I know them not.

DEIANIRA.

Look on me; who am I?

LICHAS.

Why ask me this?

O queen, &c. The messenger's information having made the presence of Lichas on the stage immediately necessary, he is introduced with propriety to take his leave of Deianira, who embraces this opportunity to sound him with regard to the accusation, which she does with all the subtlety of a woman, and all the dignity of a queen, using every artifice to draw him into a confession, and at last persuading him to it by an affected indifference about her husband's fidelity.

DEIANIRA.

Be bold, and answer me.

LICHAS.

Daughter of Œneus, wife of Hercules,
If I am not deceiv'd, 'tis Deianira,
My queen, my mistress.

DEIANIRA.

Am I so indeed!
Am I thy mistress?

LICHAS.

Doubtless.

DEIANIRA.

Why, 'tis well
Thou dost confess it: then what punishment
Would'st thou deserve, if thou wert faithless to her?

LICHAS.

How faithless? mean'st thou to betray me?

DEIANIRA.

No;
The fraud is thine.

LICHAS.

'Twas folly thus to stay
And hear thee; I must hence.

DEIANIRA.

Thou shalt not go
Till I have ask'd thee one short question.

LICHAS.

Ask it,
For so it seems thou art resolv'd.

DEIANIRA.

Inform me;

If I am not deceiv'd. This may, perhaps, appear odd to the English reader, but it is almost a literal translation of the original, 'ει μη κυρω 'λεγω ματαια,' 'nisi perperam video, nisi oculi me fallunt.'

For so it seems. The Greek is, 'ου σιγηλος ει, 'you are not very silent, 'or, not much given to silence;' a kind of impertinent familiarity from 'a servant to a mistress which modern delicacy would scarce admit; I have therefore softened it a little in the translation.

This captive, dost thou know her?

LICHAS.

I have told thee;
What would'st thou more?

DEIANIRA.

Didst thou not say, this slave,
Tho' now, it seems, thou know'st her not, was daughter
Of Eurytus, her name Iole!

LICHAS.

Where?
To whom did I say this? what witness have you?

DEIANIRA.

Assembled multitudes; the citizens
Of Trachis heard thee.

LICHAS.

They might say they heard
Reports like these; but must it therefore seem
A truth undoubted?

DEIANIRA.

Seem? didst thou not swear
That thou hadst brought this woman to partake
The bed of my Alcides?

LICHAS.

Did I say so?
But tell me who this stranger is.

DEIANIRA.

The man
Who heard thee say, Alcides' love for her,
And not the Lydian, laid the city waste.

LICHAS.

Let him come forth and prove it; 'tis no mark
Of wisdom thus to trifle with th' unhappy.

This stranger. It is plain from hence, that the Messenger, who had accused Lichas, remains on the stage during all this scene; Lichas bids him stand forth and make good his charge; Deianira prevents him, and takes a better method to bring him to confession.

DEIANIRA.

O! do not, I beseech thee by that pow'r,
Whose thunders roll o'er Œta's lofty grove,
Do not conceal the truth; thou speak'st to one
Not unexperienc'd in the ways of men;
To one who knows we cannot always joy
In the same object: 'tis an idle task
To take up arms against all-pow'rful love;
Love which commands the gods; love conquer'd me,
And wherefore shou'd it not subdue another,
Whose nature and whose passions are the same?
If my Alcides is indeed oppress'd
With this sad malady, I blame him not;
That were a folly; nor this hapless maid,
Who meant no ill, no injury to me;
'Tis not for this I speak; but, 'mark me well;
If thou wert taught by him to utter falsehood,
A vile and shameful lesson didst thou learn;
And if thou art thy own instructor, know,
Thou shalt seem wicked e'en when most sincere,
And never be believ'd: speak then the truth;
For to be branded with the name of liar
Is ignominy fit for slaves alone,
And not for thee; nor think thou canst conceal it;
Those who have heard the tale, will tell it me.
If fear deters thee, thou hast little cause;
For to suspect his falsehood is my grief,
To know it, none; already have I seen
Alcides' heart estrang'd to other loves,
Yet did no rival ever hear from me
One bitter word, nor will I now reproach
This wretched slave, e'en tho' she pines for him
With strongest love: alas! I pity her,
Whose beauty thus hath been the fatal cause
Of all her mis'ry, laid her country waste,
And brought her here, far from her native land,
A helpless captive: but no more of this;

Only remember, if thou must be false,
Be false to others, but be true to me.

CHORUS.

She speaks most kindly to thee; be persuaded;
Hereafter thou shalt find her not ungrateful;
We too will thank thee.

LICHAS.

O! my dearest mistress,
Not unexperienc'd thou in human life,
Nor ignorant; and therefore nought from thee
Will I conceal, but tell thee all the truth:
'Tis as he said; and Hercules indeed
Doth love Iole: for her sake alone
Œchalia, her unhappy country, fell;
This, (for 'tis fit I tell thee) he confess'd,
Nor will'd me to conceal it; but I fear'd
'Twou'd pierce thy heart to hear th' unwelcome tale,
And therefore own I wou'd have kept it from thee;
That crime, if such it was, I have committed;
But since thou know'st it all, let me entreat thee,
For her sake and thy own, O! do not hate
This wretched captive, but remember well,
What thou hast promis'd, faithfully perform.
He, whose victorious arm hath conquer'd all,
Now yields to her, and is a slave to love.

DEIANIRA.

'Tis my resolve to act as thou advisest;
I'll not resist the gods, nor add fresh weight
To my calamity: let us go in,
That thou may'st bear my orders to Alcides,
And with them gifts in kind return for those
We have receiv'd from him; thou must not hence

He, whose victorious arm, &c.

Quem nunquam Juno seriesque immensa laborum,
Fregerit, huic Iolen imposuisse jugum. OVID.

With empty hand, who hither brought'st to me
Such noble presents, and so fair a train. *Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Thee, Venus, gods and men obey,
And universal is thy sway;
Need I recount the pow'rs subdu'd by love?
Neptune who shakes the solid ground,
The king of Erebus profound,
Or, the great lord of all, Saturnian Jove?
To mortals let the song descend,
To pity our afflicted friend,
And soothe the injur'd Deianira's woes;
For her the angry rivals came,
For her they felt an equal flame,
For her, behold! the doubtful battle glows.

ANTISTROPHE.

In dreadful majesty array'd,
Affrighting sore the fearful maid,
Uprose the horned monarch of the flood;
He who through fair Ætolia's plain
Pours his rich tribute to the main;
A bull's tremendous form belied the god;
From his own Thebes, to win her love,
With him the happier son of Jove,
The great Alcides came, and in his hand
The club, the bow, and glitt'ring spear;
Whilst Venus, to her vot'ries near,
Wav'd o'er their heads her all-deciding wand.

Thee, Venus, &c. This is the third intermede, or song of the Chorus: my female readers will please to observe, that the gallant Sophocles has here given us another ode to love, which naturally introduces an account of the combat of Hercules and Achelous for Deianira, the heroine of the drama.

EPODE.

Warm and more warm the conflict grows,
Dire was the noise of rattling bows,
Of front to front oppos'd, and hand to hand;
Deep was the animated strife
For love, for conquest, and for life;
Alternate groans re-echo'd thro' the land:
Whilst pensive on the distant shore,
She heard the doubtful battle roar,
Many a sad tear the hapless virgin shed;
Far from her tender mother's arms,
She knows not yet for whom her charms
She keeps, or who shall share her bridal bed.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

My guest, in pity to the captive train,
Laments their woes, and takes his kind farewell;
Mean-time, my friends, in secret came I here
To pour forth all my mis'ries, and impart
To you my inmost thoughts, my last resolve:
Alas! within these walls I have receiv'd,
Like the poor sailor, an unhappy freight
To sink me down; no virgin, but a wife,
The wife of my Alcides; his lov'd arms
Now must embrace us both: my faithful lord
(Faithful and good I thought him) thus rewards
My tender cares, and all the tedious toils
I suffer'd for him; but I will be calm;
For 'tis an evil I have felt before:
And yet to live with her! with her to share

My husband's bed! what woman can support it?
Her youth is stealing onward to it's prime,
Whilst mine is wither'd, and the eye, which longs
To pluck the op'ning flow'r, from the dry leaf
Will turn aside; her younger charms, I fear,
Have conquer'd, and henceforth in name alone
Shall Deianira be Alcides' wife.
But ill do rage and violence become
The prudent matron; therefore mark me well,
And hear what I have purpos'd, to relieve
My troubled heart: within a brazen urn,
Conceal'd from ev'ry eye, I long have kept
That antient gift which Nessus did bequeath me,
The hoary centaur, who was wont for hire
To bear the trav'ller o'er the rapid flood
Of deep Evenus, not with oars or sail
He stem'd the torrent, but with nervous arm
Oppos'd, and pass'd it: me, when first a bride
I left my father's hospitable roof
With my Alcides, in his arms he bore
Athwart the current, half way o'er, he dar'd
To offer violence, I shriek'd aloud;
When, lo! the son of Jove, his bow swift bent,
Sent forth a shaft, and pierc'd the monster's breast,
Who with his dying voice did thus address me,
'Daughter of Œneus, listen to my words,

Nessus. The story, which is the foundation of the piece before us, stripped of all its poetical ornaments, is as follows. Nessus was one of that fabulous race called Centaurs, half man and half horse; his usual employment was the carrying passengers over the river Evenus; Deianira entrusted herself to his care; the Centaur *fell in* love with, and would have ravished her; Hercules perceiving his design, slew him with one of his arrows, poisoned with the blood of the Lernæan Hydra; Nessus, to revenge himself on his rival, told Deianira in his last moments, that if ever her husband proved faithless, she might recall his love by dipping his garment in some of that blood which was then streaming from him; Deianira believed him, and preserved the philtre; the consequence of this forms the subject of the Trachiniæ.

'So shalt thou profit by the last sad journey
'Which I shall ever go; if in thy hand
'Thou take the drops out-flowing from the wound
'This arrow made, dipp'd in th' envenom'd blood
'Of the Lernæan hydra, with that charm
'May'st thou subdue the heart of thy Alcides,
'Nor shall another ever gain his love:'
Mindful of this, my friends, (for from that hour
In secret have I kept the precious gift)
Behold a garment dip'd i' th' very blood
He gave me, nor did I forget to add
What he enjoin'd, but have prepar'd it all:
I know no evil arts, nor wou'd I learn them,
For they who practise such are hateful to me;
I only wish the charm may be of pow'r
To win Alcides from this virgin's love,
And bring him back to Deianira's arms,
If ye shall deem it lawful, but if not
I'll go no farther.

CHORUS.

Cou'd we be assur'd
Such is indeed th' effect, 'tis well determin'd.

DEIANIRA.

I cannot but believe it, tho' as yet
Experience never hath confirm'd it to me.

CHORUS.

Thou should'st be certain; thou but seem'st to know
If thou hast never tried.

DEIANIRA.

I'll try it soon;
For see e'en now he comes out at the portal:
Let him not know our purpose; if the deed
Be wrong, concealment may prevent reproach:
Therefore be silent.

SCENE II.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

LICHAS.

Speak thy last commands,
Daughter of Œneus, for already long
Have we delay'd our journey.

DEIANIRA.

Know then, Lichas,
That whilst thou commun'dst with thy friends, myself
Have hither brought a garment which I wove
For my Alcides; thou must bear it to him:
Tell him, no mortal must with touch profane
Pollute the sacred gift, nor sun behold it,
Nor holy temple, nor domestic hearth,
Ere at the altar of paternal Jove
Himself shall wear it; 'twas my solemn vow
Whene'er he shou'd return, that, cloth'd in this,
He to the gods shou'd offer sacrifice.
Bear too this token, he will know it well;
Away: remember to perform thy office,
But go no farther, so shall double praise,
And favour from us both reward thy duty.

LICHAS.

If I have aught of skill, by Hermes right
Instructed in his art, I will not fail

Nor sun behold it, &c. Deianira probably gave this caution because she imagined that the virtue of her charm would be extracted by fire, and consequently, if held near that, would have no effect when Hercules put it on.

This token. This token was a σφραγις, or seal-ring, which Deianira sent with the vest, to convince Hercules that it came from her.

By Hermes, &c. Hermes or Mercury always appears as messenger of the gods, and favourite errand-boy of Jupiter; he therefore naturally presided over mortal messengers, and is properly mentioned by the herald as his patron and instructor.

To bear thy gift, and faithful to report
What thou hast said.

DEIANIRA.

Begone; what here hath past
Thou know'st.

LICHAS.

I do; and shall bear back the news
That all is well.

DEIANIRA.

Thou art thyself a witness
How kindly I receiv'd the guest he sent me.

LICHAS.

It fill'd my heart with pleasure to behold it.

DEIANIRA.

What can'st thou tell him more? alas! I fear
He'll know to well the love I bear to him;
Wou'd I cou'd be as certain he'd return it! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

You, who on Œta's craggy summit dwell,
Or from the rock, whence gushing riv'lets flow,
Bathe in the warmer springs below,

To bear thy gift. Ignoroque Lichæ, quid tradat nescia, luctus
Ipsa suos tradit.

says the elegant Ovid, who has told this story in a most agreeable manner in the ninth book of his Metamorphoses.

You, who on Œta's, &c. This is the fourth song or intermede of the Chorus, who, rejoicing at the expected arrival of Hercules, invite the neighbouring youths and maidens to celebrate the festival, and welcome the returning conqueror.

Warmer springs, &c. It is reported that Vulcan first raised warm springs in Trachis or Sicily for the use of Hercules, whence warm baths were usually called λουτρα Ηρακλεια, 'Herculian Baths.'

You, who near the Melian bay
To golden-shafted Diana hymn the lay,
Now haste to string the lyre, and tune the vocal shell.

ANTISTROPHE I.

No mournful theme demands your pensive strain,
But such as kindled by the sacred fire
The Muses might themselves admire,
A loud and cheerful song; for see,
The son of Jove returns with victory,
And richest spoils reward a life of toil and pain.

STROPHE II.

Far from his native land he took his way:
For twelve long moons, uncertain of his fate,
Did we lament his exil'd state,
What time his anxious wife deplor'd
With never ceasing tears her absent lord;
But Mars at last hath clos'd his long laborious day.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Let him from fair Eubœa's isle appear;
Let winds and raging seas oppose no more,
But waft him to the wish'd-for shore;
Th' anointed vest's persuasive charms
Shall bring him soon to Deianira's arms,
Soon shall we see the great the lov'd Alcides here.

The Melian Bay, &c. The bay of Melis was not far from Trachis, and adjoining to Artemisium, celebrated by the famous sea-fight between the Grecians and the Persians, on the same day with the battle of Thermopylæ; near it was a temple sacred to Diana.

Far from his native land, &c. The last Strophe and Antistrophe of this Chorus are so drolly translated by Mr. Adams, that I cannot refuse my readers a sight of it. It runs as follows:

STROPHE II.

'He whom, absent from home twelve months, we waited for, being 'on the rough sea, knowing nothing of him, but his dear miserable wife, 'the wretched lady, with ever-streaming tears afflicted her sad heart; 'but now raging Mars hath finished the term of his labours.'

ANTISTROPHE II.

'Let him come, nor let his ship stand still e'er he arrives at this city, 'leaving this island habitation, where he is said to sacrifice, whence let

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

Alas! my friends, I fear I've gone too far.

CHORUS.

Great queen, in what?

DEIANIRA.

I know not what; but dread
Something to come, lest where I had most hope
Of happiness, I meet with bitt'rest woe.

CHORUS.

Mean'st thou thy gift to Hercules?

DEIANIRA.

I do;
Nor wou'd I henceforth counsel those I lov'd
To do a dark and desp'rate deed like this,
Uncertain of th' event.

CHORUS.

How was it? speak,
If thou can'st tell us.

DEIANIRA.

O! 'twas wonderful!
For you shall hear it; know then, the white wool

' him come hastening all the day, clad with this well-besmeared coat of
' reconciliation of his love to Deianira, as the Centaur directed her.'

The white wool, &c. This wool was probably made use of as a sponge, with which, after dipping it in the blood, she wetted the magic robe; this imbibing the fiery and poisonous particles, on being exposed to the air, took fire, and consumed away, a circumstance which could not fail to alarm the fears of Deianira, who now begins to repent of her hazardous attempt: her remorse is naturally and pathetically described, and at the same time gradually prepares the audience for the catastrophe.

Wherein I wrap'd th' anointed vest, untouch'd
By any hand, drop'd self-consum'd away,
And down the stone, e'en like a liquid, flow'd
Dissolving: (but 'tis fit I tell you all)
Whate'er the wounded centaur did enjoin me
Mindful to practise, sacred as the laws
On brazen tablets grav'd, I have perform'd:
Far from the fire, and from the sun's warm beams
He bade me keep the charm, from ev'ry eye
In secret hid, till time shou'd call on me
T' anoint and use it: this was done; and now,
The fleece in secret pluck'd, the charm prepar'd,
Long from the sun within a chest conceal'd,
At length I brought it forth, and sent the gift
To my Alcides, when behold a wonder,
Most strange for tongue to tell, or heart of man
E'en to conceive! perchance the wool I cast
Into the sunshine; soon as it grew warm
It fell to dust, consuming all away
In most strange manner, then from th' earth uprose
In frothy bubbles, e'en as from the grape
In yellow autumn flows the purple wine:
I know not what to think; but much I fear
I've done a horrid deed: for, why, my friends,
Why shou'd the dying savage wish to serve
His murd'rer? that cou'd never be: O! no;
He only meant by flatt'ry to destroy
Me his destroyer: truth is come too late,
And I alone have slain my dear Alcides,
I know that by his arrows Chiron fell;
I know whate'er they touch'd they still were fatal;

Chiron. Chiron was one of the Centaurs, and was wounded by Hercules with one of his arrows dipped in the blood of the Hydra; the story is told at large in the fifth book of Ovid's Fasti. Deianira recollects that Hercules had slain Nessus also with one of the same arrows which she knew to be poisoned; the effect was the same on both, and the consequence but too visible with regard to Hercules himself.

That very poison mingled with the blood
Of dying Nessus, will not that too kill
My Hercules? it must: but if he dies,
My resolution is to perish with him;
Those, who their honour and their virtue prize,
Can never live with infamy and shame.

CHORUS.

'Tis fit we tremble at a deed of horror;
But 'tis not fitting, ere, we know th' event,
To give up hope, and yield us to despair.

DEIANIRA.

There is no hope where evil counsel's ta'en.

CHORUS.

But when we err from ignorance alone,
Small is the crime, and slight the punishment;
Such is thy fault.

DEIANIRA.

The guiltless may talk thus,
Who know no ill; not those, who are unhappy.

CHORUS.

No more; unless thou mean'st thy son shou'd hear thee,
Who now returns in search of thy Alcides;
Behold him here.

SCENE II.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

HYLLUS.

O! wou'd that thou wert dead!
Wou'd I were not thy son! or, being so,
Wou'd I cou'd change thy wicked heart!

DEIANIRA.

My son,
What means this passion?

HYLLUS.

Thou hast slain thy husband;

This very day my father hast thou slain.

DEIANIRA.

Alas! my child, what say'st thou?

HYLLUS.

What is past,
And therefore must be; who can e'er undo
The deed that's done?

DEIANIRA.

But who cou'd say I did it?

HYLLUS.

I saw it with these eyes; I heard it all
From his own lips.

DEIANIRA.

Where did'st thou see him then?
Tell me, O! quickly tell me.

HYLLUS.

If I must,
Observe me well: when Hercules, return'd
From conquest, had laid waste the noble city
Of Eurytus, with fair triumphal spoils
He to Eubœa came, where o'er the sea,
Which beats on ev'ry side, Cenæum's top
Hangs dreadful, thither to paternal Jove
His new rais'd altars in the leafy wood
He came to visit; there did my glad eyes
Behold Alcides first: as he prepar'd
The frequent victim, from the palace came
Lichas thy messenger, and with him brought

There did my glad eyes, &c. It is observed, that the distance from Cenæum to Trachis, is too great to admit of Hyllus's return in the short time which Sophocles has allowed him; for how could Hyllus perform this journey, see his father, assist at the sacrifice, be a witness of his agonies, and return back to Trachis, during the representation of little more than one act? The unity of time is here apparently broken. The poet, as Brumoy imagines, presumed on the distance of Athens, from the scene of action, and probably met with indulgence from his spectators, though it was not agreeable to his usual accuracy in these particulars.

The fatal gift: wrap'd in the deadly garment
(For such was thy command) twelve oxen then
Without a blemish, firstlings of the spoil,
He slew; together next a hundred fell,
The mingled flock: pleas'd with his gaudy vest
And happy in it he awhile remain'd,
Off'ring with joy his grateful sacrifice;
But, lo! when from the holy victim rose
The bloody flame, and from the pitchy wood
Exhal'd it's moisture, sudden a cold sweat
Bedew'd his limbs, and to his body stuck
As by the hand of some artificer
Clos'd join'd to ev'ry part, the fatal vest;
Convulsion rack'd his bones, and through his veins,
Like the fell serpent's deadly venom, rag'd;
Then questioned he the wretched guiltless Lichas
By what detested arts he had procur'd
The poison'd garb; he, ignorant of all,
Cou'd only say, it was the gift he brought
From Deianira; when Alcides heard it,
Tortur'd with pain, he took him by the foot,
And hurl'd him headlong on a pointed rock
That o'er the ocean hung; his brains dash'd forth
With mingled blood flow'd thro' his clotted hair
In horrid streams; the multitude with shrieks
Lamented loud the fury of Alcides,
And Lichas' hapless fate; none durst oppose
His raging frenzy; prostrate on the earth
Now wou'd he lay and groan; and now uprising
Wou'd bellow forth his griefs; the mountain-tops
Of Locris, and Eubœa's rocks return'd
His dreadful cries; then on the ground out-stretch'd
In bitt'rest wrath he curs'd the nuptial bed
Of Œneus, and his execrations pour'd
On thee his worst of foes: at length his eyes,
Distorted forth from the surrounding smoak,
He cast on me, who midst attending crowds

Wept his sad fate; 'Approach,' he cried, 'my son,
'Do not forsake thy father, rather come
'And share his fate than leave me here; O! haste,
'And take me hence; bear me where never eye
'Of mortal shall behold me; O! my child,
'Let me not perish here:' thus spake my father,
And I obey'd: distracted with his pains
A vessel brings him to this place, and soon
Living or dead you will behold him here.
This have thy horrid machinations done
For thy Alcides: O! may justice doom thee
To righteous punishment, if it be lawful
For me to call down vengeance on a mother,
As sure it is, on one who hath disclaim'd
All piety like thee; the earth sustains not
A better man than him whom thou hast murder'd,
Nor shalt thou e'er behold his like again.

[*Exit* DEIANIRA.

CHORUS.

Whence this abrupt departure? know'st thou not
To go in silence thus confirms thy guilt?

HYLLUS.

Let her be gone; and may some prosp'rous gale
Waft her far off, that these abhorring eyes
May never see her more! what boots the name
Of mother, when no longer she performs
A mother's duty? let her go in peace,

Nor shalt thou, &c. 'Οψιον αλλον εκ οψει ποτε' says the original. Shakespear makes his Hamlet speak the same language.

Take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again. HAMLET.

To go in silence, &c. This silence exactly resembles that of Eurydice in the Antigone before taken notice of, and, as Brumoy observes, is infinitely preferable to Ovid's frequent repetition of

Impia quid cessas, Deianira, mori?

'On ne s'exhorte point (says the French critic) à mourir, quand le 'dessein en est bien pris. Beaucoup moins le fait on avec tant d'art; le 'silence est plus eloquen, & plus vif.'

And, for her kindness to my father, soon
May she enjoy the blessing she bestow'd!

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

True was the oracle divine,
Long since deliver'd from Dodona's shrine,
Which said, Alcides' woes shou'd last
Till twelve revolving years were past;
Then shou'd his labours end in sweet repose:
Behold, my friends, 'tis come to pass,
'Tis all fulfill'd; for who, alas!
In peaceful death, or toil or slav'ry knows?

ANTISTROPHE I.

If deep within his tortur'd veins
The centaur's cruel poison reigns,
That from the Hydra's baleful breath
Destructive flow'd, replete with death,
On him another sun shall never rise;
The venom runs thro' ev'ry part,
And, lo! to Nessus' direful art
Alcides falls a helpless sacrifice.

STROPHE II.

Poor Deianira long deplor'd
Her waining charms, and ever faithless lord;
At length by evil counsel sway'd
Her passion's dictates she obey'd,
Resolv'd Alcides' doubtful truth to prove;
But now, alas! laments his fate
In ceaseless woe, and finds too late
A dying husband, and a foreign love.

True was the oracle, &c. This is the fifth intermede or song of the Chorus, and, if we divide the play into acts, must conclude the fourth, as it is the only part where the stage can be supposed vacant: it turns, we see, on the double sense of the oracle, which was now accomplished in the death of Hercules. This oracle is mentioned by Deianira in the first scene of the tragedy, and by Hercules himself also in the last.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Another death must soon succeed,
Another victim soon shall bleed,
Fatal, Alcides', was the dart
That pierc'd the rival monarch's heart,
And brought Iole from her native land;
From Venus did our sorrows flow.
The secret spring of all our woe,
For nought was done but by her dread command.
[*Exeu*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

(A Noise within the Palace.)

CHORUS.

Or I'm deceiv'd, or I did hear loud shrieks
Within the palace; 'twas the voice of one
In anguish; doubtless some calamity
Hath fall'n upon us now; what can it be?
But see, yon matron, with contracted brow
And unaccustom'd sadness, comes to tell
The dreadful news.

SCENE II.

NURSE, CHORUS.

NURSE.

What woes, my hapless daughters,
Alcides' fatal gift hath brought upon us?

CHORUS.

What dost thou tell us?

Another death. The Chorus foretells the death of Deianira, who had already declared that if she did not succeed in the attempt to regain her husband's affection, she would not long survive him; this prepares the audience for the scene that follows.

NURSE.

Deianira treads
The last sad path of mortals.

CHORUS.

Is she gone?

NURSE.

'Tis so indeed.

CHORUS.

What! dead!

NURSE.

Again I say
She is no more.

CHORUS.

Alas! how did she perish?

NURSE.

Most fearfully: 'twas dreadful to behold.

CHORUS.

How fell she then?

NURSE.

By her own hand.

CHORUS.

But wherefore?
What madness, what disorder, what cou'd move her
To perpetrate so terrible a deed?
Thus adding death to death.

NURSE.

The fatal steel
Destroy'd her.

CHORUS.

Did'st thou see it?

NURSE.

I was by,
Close by her side.

CHORUS.

How was it?

NURSE.

Her own arm

Struck the sad blow.

CHORUS.

Indeed!

NURSE.

Most veritably.

CHORUS.

In evil hour this rival virgin came
To bring destruction here.

NURSE.

And so she did;
Had'st thou like me been witness to the deed,
Thou would'st much more have pitied her.

CHORUS.

Alas!
How cou'd a woman do it?

NURSE.

'Twas most dreadful,
As thou shalt hear, for I will tell thee all:
Soon as she enter'd at the palace gate
And saw her son prepare the fun'ral bed,
To th' inmost chamber silent she retir'd
From ev'ry eye, there, at the altar's feet
Falling, lamented loud her widow'd state;
And ever as she lit on aught her hands
Had us'd in happier days, the tears wou'd flow;
From room to room she wander'd, and if chance
A lov'd domestic cross'd her she wou'd weep
And mourn her fate, for ever now depriv'd
Of converse sweet, and hymeneal joys;
Then wou'd she strew her garments on the bed
Of her Alcides, (for conceal'd I watch'd

And ever as she lit, &c. Such little incidents as these, arising with propriety from situation and circumstance, contribute as much as any thing to point out the superiority of a good writer: in Sophocles we always meet with the language of nature, and a complete knowledge of the human heart, without any of those forced conceits and refinements so frequent in modern writers; nothing can exceed the simplicity and elegance of this description: Virgil felt all its merit, and has copied it closely. See Æn. B. 4.

Her ev'ry motion) throw herself upon it,
And as the tears in a warm flood burst forth;
'Farewell! (she cried) for ever farewell now
'My nuptial couch! for never shalt thou more
'Receive this wretched burthen;' thus she spake,
And with quick hand the golden button loos'd,
Then cast her robe aside, her bosom bar'd
And seem'd prepar'd to strike; I ran and told
The dreadful purpose to her son, too late
We came, and saw her wounded to the heart;
The pious son beheld his bleeding mother
And wept; for well he knew, by anger fir'd,
And the fell centaur's cruel fraud betray'd,
Unweeting she had done the dreadful deed:
Close to her side he laid him down, and join'd
His lips to hers, lamenting sore that thus
He had accus'd her guiltless; then deplor'd
His own sad fate, thus suddenly bereav'd
Of both his parents: you have heard my tale.
Who to himself shall promise length of life?
None but the fool: for, O! to-day alone
Is ours; we are not certain of to-morrow.

CHORUS.

Which shall I weep? which most our hearts shou'd fill
With grief, the present, or the future ill?
The dying, or the dead? 'tis equal woe
To feel the stroke, or fear th' impending blow.

STROPHE.

O! for a breeze to waft us o'er
Propitious to some distant shore!

O! for a breeze, &c. This is the sixth and last intermede, or song of the Chorus, who, alarmed at the approaching fate of Hercules, and shocked at the death of Deianira, lament their own distressful situation, as obliged to be witnesses of so melancholy a scene: it is remarkable, that throughout this play, the Chorus's are every one of them closely attached to the subject, and arise naturally from the various circumstances of it.

Some distant shore. The learned reader, who consults this passage in

To shield our souls from sore affright,
And save us from the dreadful sight:
That sight the hardest heart wou'd move
In his last pangs the son of Jove;
To see the poison, run through ev'ry vein,
And limbs convuls'd with agonizing pain.

ANTISTROPHE.

Behold th' attendant train is nigh,
I hear the voice of misery;
E'en as the plaintive nightingale,
That warbles sweet her mournful tale:
Silent and slow they lead him on;
Hark! I hear Alcides groan!
Again 'tis silence all! this way they tread;
Or sleeps he now, or rests he with the dead?

SCENE III.

HERCULES, HYLLUS, NURSE, CHORUS, ATTENDANTS.

HYLLUS.

Alas! my father; whither shall I go?
Wretch that I am! O! where shall I betake me?
What will become of thy afflicted son?

ATTENDANT.

Speak softly, youth, do not awake his pains;
Refrain thy grief, for yet Alcides lives,
Tho' verging to the tomb; be calm.

the original, will find that the Scholiasts have entirely mistaken the meaning of it; and, according to custom, misled the translators, one of whom renders it thus, 'Utinam aliquis aspiret secundus nostram ad 'domum ventus!' 'Would to heaven a favourable wind would blow 'us home!' though it is apparent, that as the Chorus consists of virgins of Trachis, they were at home already, and only wished to be removed for a time, to avoid a sight so disagreeable as the death of Hercules. Ratallerus, who, as I observed, is the only translator that seems to have understood Sophocles, perceived this absurdity, and has given us the true sense.

HYLLUS.

What say'st thou?
Doth ye yet live?

ATTENDANT.

He doth; disturb not thus
His slumbers, nor provoke the dire disease.

HYLLUS.

Alas! I cannot bear to see him thus.

HERCULES *(awakes.)*

O! Jove! where am I, and with whom? what land
Contains the wretched Hercules, oppress'd
With never-ending woes? ah, me! again
The deadly poison racks me.

ATTENDANT (*to* HYLLUS.)

See'st thou not
'Twere better far to have remain'd in silence,
And not awak'd him.

HYLLUS.

'Twas impossible
Unmov'd to look on such calamity;
I cou'd not do it.

HERCULES.

O! Cenæan rocks,
Where smoke the sacred altars! is it thus
O! Jove, thou dost reward my piety?
What dreadful punishment is this thy hand
Hath laid on me, who never cou'd deserve
Such bitter wrath? what incantations now,
What pow'r of med'cine can assuage my pain,
Unless great Jove assisted? health to me

O! Jove, where am I? Hercules, we must suppose, is here brought on the stage on a couch or litter, 'affertur (says Camerarius) inter cruciatus sopitus in lectulo;' his pains intermitting for a short time, he is dropped into a slumber; in this condition he is met by Hyllus, who imagines him to be dead; the Chorus perceive he is only asleep; he awakes in agony; the scene strongly resembles one in the Hyppolytus of Euripides.

Without him, were a miracle indeed.
Let me, O! let me rest, refuse me not
A little slumber; why will ye torment me?
Why bend me forward? O! 'tis worse than death;
Had you not wak'd me, I had been at peace:
Again it rages with redoubled force;
Where are you now, ye thankless Grecians, where,
Whom I have toil'd to serve on the rough main,
And through the pathless wood? where are you now
To help a dying wretch? will no kind hand
Stretch forth the friendly sword, or in the flame
Consume me? none, alas! will cut me off
From hated life.

ATTENDANT.

O! youth! assist thy father;
It is beyond my strength; thy quicker sight
May be more useful.

HYLLUS.

My poor aid is ready;
But wheresoe'er I am, 'tis not in me
T' expel the subtle poison that destroys him;
Such is the will of Jove.

HERCULES.

My son, my son,
Where art thou? bear me up, assist me; O!
Again it comes, th' unconquerable ill,
The dire disease; O! Pallas, aid me now,
Draw forth thy sword, my son; strike, strike thy father,
And heal the wound thy impious mother made;
O! cou'd I see her like myself destroy'd,
I shou'd be happy! brother of great Jove,
Sweet Pluto, hear me! O! with speedy death
Lay me to rest, and bury all my woes.

CHORUS.

The anguish of th' unhappy man, my friends,
Is terrible; I tremble but to hear him.

HERCULES.

What hath this body suffer'd! O! the toils,
The labours I endur'd, the pangs I felt,
Unutterable woes! but never aught
So dreadful as this sore calamity
Oppress'd Alcides! not the wife of Jove,
Nor vile Eurystheus cou'd torment me thus,
As, Œneus, thy deceitful daughter hath;
Oh! I am tangled in a cruel net,
Wov'n by the furies; it devours my flesh,
Dries up my veins, and drinks the vital blood;
My body's wither'd, and I cannot break
Th' indissoluble chain: nor hostile spear,
Nor earth-born giants, nor the savage herd,
The wild Barbarian, or the Grecian host,
Not all the nations I have journey'd o'er
Cou'd do a deed like this: at last I fall
Like a poor coward, by a woman's hand,
Unarm'd, and unassisted; O! my son,
Now prove thyself the offspring of Alcides;
Nor let thy rev'rence of a mother's name
Surpass thy duty to an injur'd father;
Go, bring her hither, give her to my wrath,
That I may see whom thou wilt most lament,
When thou behold'st my vengeance fall on her;
Fear not, my son, but go; have pity on me,
Pity thy father; all must pity me,
Whilst they behold, e'en as the tender maid,
Alcides weep, who never wept before.
I bore my sorrows all without a groan,
But now thou see'st I am a very woman,
Come near, my child; O! think what I endure,

O! *the toils, &c.* This pathetic lamentation of Hercules hath met with universal applause from the admirers and critics of antiquity. The great Roman orator has left us a translation of it, which remains almost the only specimen of his poetical abilities. See Tully's Tusculan Questions, b. 2.

For I will shew thee; look on this poor body,
Let all behold it: what a sight is here!
Oh! me! again the cruel poison tears
My entrails, nor affords a moment's ease.
O! take me, Pluto, to thy gloomy reign;
Father of lightning, mighty Jove, send down
Thy bolt, and strike me now! again it racks
It tortures me! O! hands, that once had strength,
And you, my sinewy arms, was it by you
The terrible Nemæan lion fell,
The dreadful hydra, and the lawless race
Of centaurs? did this wither'd hand subdue
The Erymanthian boar, wide-wasting plague!
And from the shades of Orcus drag to light
The triple-headed monster? by this arm
Did the fierce guardian of the golden fruit
In Libya's desarts fall? unnumber'd toils
Have I endur'd of old, and never yet
Did mortal bear a trophy from Alcides:
But nerveless now this arm; see, from the bone
Darts the loose flesh; I waste beneath the pow'r
Of this dark pestilence: O! Hercules,
Why boast thy mother sprung of nobler race,
And vainly call thyself the son of Jove?
But, mark me well; this creeping shadow still,
Poor as it is, shall yet revenge itself
On her who did the execrable deed;
Wou'd she were here to feel my wrath, to know
And teach mankind, that Hercules tho' dead,
As whilst he liv'd, can scourge the guilty still!

CHORUS.

Unhappy Greece! how wilt thou mourn the loss
Of such a man!

Nemæan lion. Nemæa was a wood near Argia in Peloponesus, where Hercules slew a lion of prodigious size and fierceness.

The Erymanthian boar. Erymanthus was a mountain of Arcadia, where Hercules slew a wild boar that infested the country.

HYLLUS.

Permit me but to speak,
Distemper'd as thou art, my father, hear me;
Nought shall I ask unfit for thee to grant;
Be calm and listen to me; yet thou know'st not
How groundless thy complaints, and what new joy
Awaits thee still.

HERCULES.

Be brief then, and inform me;
My pains afflict me so I cannot guess
Thy subtle purpose.

HYLLUS.

'Twas to speak of her,
My mother; 'twas to tell thee of her state
And how unweeting she offended thee.

HERCULES.

Thou worst of children! would'st thou then defend
The murd'rer of thy father? dar'st thou thus
Recall the sad remembrance of her crime?

HYLLUS.

It must not be conceal'd; I know too well
I can no longer hide it.

HERCULES.

What? her guilt?
'Tis known already.

HYLLUS.

Thou'lt not always think so.

HERCULES.

Speak then, but take good heed thou shew thyself
Worthy thy father.

HYLLUS.

Know then,—she is dead.

HERCULES.

O! dreadful! murder'd? by what hand?

HYLLUS.

Her own.

HERCULES.

Wou'd she had fall'n by mine!

HYLLUS.

Alas! my father,
Did'st thou know all, thy anger wou'd be chang'd
To pity for her.

HERCULES.

That were strange indeed;
Why dost thou think so?

HYLLUS.

She did mean thee well,
But err'd unknowing.

HERCULES.

Meant she well to slay
Thy father?

HYLLUS

Thy new marriage was the cause;
She had prepar'd a philtre for thy love,
And knew not 'twas a poison.

HERCULES.

But, say, who
So skill'd in magic arts at Trachis here
Cou'd give her this?

HYLLUS.

The savage centaur Nessus,
Who did persuade her 't wou'd restore thy love
Giv'n to another wife.

HERCULES.

Undone Alcides!
I die, my child; there is no life for me:
Alas! I see it now; I see my woes;
Hyllus, away, thy father is no more;
Begone, and call thy brothers, call Alcmena,
The wife, alas! in vain, the wife of Jove;
Go, bring them here, that with my latest breath
I may declare my fate long since foretold
By oracles divine.

HYLLUS.

Alcmena's gone
To Tyrinth; with her many of thy sons
Remain; some dwell at Thebes, the rest are here,
And wait with me to hear, and to obey thee.

HERCULES.

Then listen to me, for the time is come
When thou must prove thyself indeed my son;
Know, Jove, my heav'nly sire, long since foretold
I was not born to perish by the hand
Of living man, but from some habitant
Of Pluto's dark abode shou'd meet my fate;
The centaur Nessus (so was it fulfill'd)
Though dead destroy'd me: but I'll tell thee more,
New oracles confirm'd the old, for know
When to the Selli's sacred grove I came,
(The wand'ring priests who o'er the mountains roam,
And rest their wearied limbs on the cold ground)
An antient oak prophetic did declare
That if I liv'd to this decisive hour,
Here all my labours, all my toils shou'd end:
I thought it told me I shou'd live in peace;
Alas! it only meant that I must die,
For death will put an end to ev'ry care.
Since thus it is, my son, thou too must join
To ease Alcides; let me not reproach thee,

To Tyrinth. Tyrinth or Tyrinthia was a city in the neighbourhood of Argos.

Of living man. The original is πεφυτος ανδρος, which literally translated answers exactly to our common expression, 'no man breathing;' but this is too low and familiar for tragedy: it is observable, that there is a strong resemblance between the oracles of antiquity, and the witches of modern times: we cannot read the passage before us, without recollecting a parallel one in Shakespear, where he makes his witches foretell,

'That none of woman born should slay Macbeth;'

which is accompanied by it's proving afterwards that Macduff

'Was from his mother's womb untimely rip'd,'

in the same manner as Hercules fell by the artifice of Nessus, long after his death.

But yield thy willing aid, nor e'er forget
The best of laws, obedience to a father.

HYLLUS.

Thy words affright me; but declare thy purpose;
Behold me ready to perform thy orders
Whate'er they be.

HERCULES.

First give me then thy hand.

HYLLUS.

But why this pledge, and wherefore anxious thus
Dost thou require it?

HERCULES.

Wilt thou give it me,
Or dost refuse?

HYLLUS.

There, take it; I obey.

HERCULES.

First swear then by the head of Jove my sire.

HYLLUS.

I will; but what?

HERCULES.

Swear that thou wilt perform
All I enjoin thee.

HYLLUS.

Bear me witness, Jove!
I swear.

HERCULES.

And imprecate the wrath divine
If thou perform'st it not,

HYLLUS.

I shall not fail;
But, if I do, may vengeance swift o'ertake me!

HERCULES.

Thou know'st the top of Œta's sacred hill.

HYLLUS.

I know it well, and many a sacrifice
Have offer'd there.

HERCULES.

That is the destin'd place,
Where thou, assisted by thy chosen friends,
My son, must bear the body of Alcides;
There shalt thou cut thee many a leafy branch
From the wild olive and deep-rooted oak,
Then cast me on it, take thy torch, and light
My fun'ral pile; without one tear or groan
Unmanly do it, if thou art my son;
For if thou fail'st, remember, after death
A father's curses will sit heavy on thee.

HYLLUS.

Alas! my father, what hast thou commanded?
What hast thou bade me do?

HERCULES.

What must be done,
Or thou art not the son of Hercules.

HYLLUS.

A dreadful deed! and must I then become
A parricide, and murder thee?

HERCULES.

O! no!
My kind physician, balm of all my woes.

HYLLUS.

Myself to cast thee in the flames! is that
An office fit for me?

HERCULES.

If that alone
Seem dreadful to thee, yet perform the rest.

HYLLUS.

I'll bear thee thither.

HERCULES.

Wilt thou raise the pile?

HYLLUS.

I will do any thing but be myself
Thy executioner.

HERCULES.

'Tis well, my son:

But one thing more, and I am satisfied;
'Tis but a little.

HYLLUS.

Be it e'er so great,
I shall obey.

HERCULES.

Thou know'st the virgin daughter
Of Eurytus.

HYLLUS.

Iole?

HERCULES.

Her, my son;
Remember, 'tis a father's last command,
And thou hast sworn obedience; that Iole
I do bequeath thee; take her to thy arms
When I am dead, and let her be thy wife:
It is not fitting she who lay by th' side
Of Hercules to any but the son
Of Hercules shou'd e'er descend; to thee
Alone I yield her: speak not, but obey me;
After thy kind compliance, to refuse
So slight a favour were to cancel all.

HYLLUS *(aside.)*

Alas! distemper'd as he is, to chide him
Were most unkind; and yet, what madness this!

Take her to thy arms. It must be acknowledged, that the request of Hercules is of a very extraordinary nature: the son is desired, or rather commanded to marry his father's mistress, and this, not to shield her from the resentment of the injured mother now dead, but only, as it should seem, that so valuable a treasure should not go out of the family. Hyllus remonstrates against it, but in vain, and at last gives his father a promise of consent, which we do not however remember to have read that he ever performed. Racine is supposed by Brumoy to have copied this incident in his Mithridate, though with some difference in the circumstance, his son being represented as an admirer of his father's mistress, and therefore well prepared to receive the legacy.

Who lay by th' side of Hercules. This is a literal translation of the original 'ἐμοὶς πλευροὶς κλιθεισαν,' and answers exactly to our own idiom,

"She might lay by th' side of an emperor, and command him tasks."

Shakespear's Othello.

HERCULES.

Thou wilt not do it then?

HYLLUS.

What! marry her,
Who slew my mother! her, who hath brought thee
To this sad state! it were an act of frenzy:
Death be my portion, rather than to live
With those I hate.

HERCULES *(turning to the* CHORUS.*)*

He will not pay me then
The duty which he owes a dying father:
But if thou dost not, curses from the gods
Await thee.

HYLLUS.

O! thou rav'st; it is the rage
Of thy distemper makes thee talk so wildly.

HERCULES.

Thou hast awaken'd all my woes; again
They torture now.

HYLLUS.

Alas! what doubts arise,
What fears perplex me!

HERCULES.

Mean'st thou to dispute
A father's will?

HYLLUS.

Must I then learn of thee
To do a wicked deed?

HERCULES.

It is not wicked,
If I request it of thee.

HYLLUS.

Is it just?

HERCULES.

It is; the gods are witnesses 'tis just.

HYLLUS.

Then by those gods I swear, I will perform
What thou command'st: I never can be deem'd

Or base, or impious, for obeying thee.

HERCULES.

'Tis well, my son; one added kindness more,
And I am satisfied: before the racks
Of dire convulsion, and the pangs of madness
Again attack me, throw me on the pile.
Haste then, and bear me to it, there at last
I shall have peace, and rest from all my sorrows.

HYLLUS.

Since 'tis thy will, my father, we submit.

HERCULES.

Now, ere the dreadful malady return,
Be firm, my soul, e'en as the harden'd steel;
Suspend thy cries, and meet the fatal blow
With joy and pleasure; bear me hence, my friends,
For you have shewn yourselves my friends indeed,
And prov'd the base ingratitude of those
From whom I sprang, the cruel gods, who saw
Unmov'd the woes of their unhappy son.
'Tis not immortal to foresee his fate;
Mine is to them disgraceful, and to me
Most terrible, to me of all mankind
The most distress'd, the poor, the lost Alcides.

CHORUS.

Iole, come not forth, unhappy virgin,
Already hast thou seen enough of woe,
And yet fresh sorrows wait thee; but remember,
All is decreed, and all the work of Jove,

Iole, &c. Iole, we may suppose is coming on the stage, anxious to know the fate of Hercules, but is stopped by the Chorus, and prevented from being a witness of the melancholy scene. Hercules is led out by Hyllus, who had promised to accompany him to Mount Œta, where he expired.

*** This tragedy gave rise to the Hercules Furens of Seneca, and the Hercule Mourant of Rotrou; they who will take the trouble to peruse these imperfect copies of Sophocles, will easily perceive how much the Latin and French poets have deviated from the simplicity and beauty of the original.

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS, KING OF THEBES.

JOCASTA, WIFE OF ŒDIPUS.

CREON, BROTHER TO JOCASTA.

TIRESIAS, A BLIND PROPHET OF THEBES.

A SHEPHERD, FROM CORINTH.

A MESSENGER.

AN OLD SHEPHERD, FORMERLY BELONGING TO LAIUS.

HIGH PRIEST OF JUPITER.

CHORUS, COMPOSED OF THE PRIESTS AND ANTIENT MEN OF THEBES, THEBAN YOUTHS, CHILDREN OF ŒDIPUS, ATTENDANTS, &c.

SCENE — THEBES, BEFORE THE PALACE OF ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ŒDIPUS, HIGH PRIEST OF JUPITER.

ŒDIPUS.

O! MY lov'd sons, the youthful progeny
Of antient Cadmus, wherefore sit you here
And suppliant thus, with sacred boughs adorn'd,

It is scarce possible to conceive any thing more solemn and magnificent than the opening of this tragedy; in the front of the scene is the palace of Œdipus; before it, an altar erected to him; at the foot of which we see a number of young men of the first quality in Thebes, with boughs of supplication in their hands, and prostrate on the earth; with them the high-priest of Jupiter, and a little behind, several other priests and old men, as preparing for a sacrifice; beyond them we have a distant view of the two temples of Minerva, with their altars, and a large concourse of people standing round them, seeming, by various acts of worship, to deprecate the general calamity; the scenery and decorations, necessary on this occasion, account in some measure for the otherwise incredible expense which the Athenians are said to have been at, in the representation of this piece.

O! my lov'd sons, &c. Œdipus, alarmed at the groans and lamentations of his people thronging to the altar, comes out of his palace to enquire into the cause of their distress; this humanity and tenderness recommend his character to the audience, and naturally excite that pity and compassion which the poet intends to raise for his succeeding misfortunes; he calls his subjects the progeny of Cadmus, who was the founder of Thebes, about two hundred years before his time.

With sacred boughs adorn'd. When prayers and supplications were to be made, either in the temples or other places, the petitioners carried boughs in their hands, bound round with fillets of white wool; this was always looked on as a mark of distress, which entitled them to a pecu-

Crowd to our altars? frequent sacrifice,
And pray'rs and sighs and sorrows fill the land.
I cou'd have sent to learn the fatal cause;
But see, your anxious sov'reign comes himself
To know it all from you; behold your king,
Renowned Œdipus; do thou, old man,
For best that office suits thy years, inform me,
Why you are come; is it the present ill
That calls you here, or dread of future woe?
Hard were indeed the heart that did not feel
For grief like yours, and pity such distress:
If there be aught that Œdipus can do
To serve his people, know me for your friend.

PRIEST.

O king! thou see'st what numbers throng thy altars;
Here, bending sad beneath the weight of years,
The hoary priests, here crowd the chosen youth
Of Thebes, with these a weak and suppliant train
Of helpless infants, last in me behold
The minister of Jove: far off thou see'st
Assembled multitudes, with laurel crown'd,
To where Minerva's hallow'd temples rise
Frequent repair, or where Ismenus laves
Apollo's sacred shrine: too well thou know'st,
Thy wretched Thebes, with dreadful storms oppress'd,

liar regard, rendered their persons sacred, and protected them from all violence: it is not improbable, but that this custom among the Greeks was borrowed from the Jews, whom we find carrying boughs on solemn festivals. See Macchab. chap. xiii.

Renowned Œdipus. Dacier observes in this place, that Œdipus's mention of himself answers the purpose, of making his person known to the spectators on his first entrance, and at the same time conveying to them an idea of his character as proud and self-sufficient; the latter of these reasons, ascribed by Dacier, may perhaps appear unnecessary to those who are acquainted with the manners and genius of antiquity; the heroes of Homer and Virgil, we may remember, make no scruple of boasting of their own abilities and perfections; Sophocles therefore wants no excuse for talking the same language.

Thy wretched Thebes, &c. This short but pathetic description of the

Scarce lifts her head above the whelming flood;
The teeming earth her blasted harvest mourns,
And on the barren plain the flocks and herds
Unnumber'd perish; dire abortion thwarts
The mother's hopes, and painful she brings forth
The half-form'd infant; baleful pestilence
Hath laid our city waste, the fiery god
Stalks o'er deserted Thebes; whilst with our groans
Enrich'd, the gloomy god of Erebus
Triumphant smiles: O! Œdipus, to thee
We bend; behold these youths, with me they kneel,
And suppliant at thy altars sue for aid,
To thee the first of men, and only less
Than them whose favour thou alone canst gain,
The gods above; thy wisdom yet may heal
The deep-felt wounds, and make the pow'rs divine
Propitious to us: Thebes long since to thee
Her safety ow'd, when from the Sphynx deliver'd

plague at Thebes cannot be sufficiently admired: the poetical image of the fiery god stalking over the city, and Pluto's growing rich with the groans of the dying men, must strike every feeling heart; perhaps the beauty and simplicity of this passage will best appear by comparing it with the tinsel refinements of Seneca, and the wild rants of our own madman Lee, on the same subject.

From the Sphynx deliver'd. The story of the Sphynx, from the variety of accounts handed down to us concerning it, is almost as much a riddle to us as it was to Œdipus: the Sphynx, according to poetical history, was a monster with the face of a woman, wings of a bird, body of a dog, and claws like a lion; she dwelt near Thebes, and every day destroyed many people; the oracle declared that she could never be conquered, till some one was found that could expound a certain riddle, or ænigma, which she proposed. After many unsuccessful attempts Œdipus came, and explained it; the Sphynx was destroyed; the nation delivered, and Œdipus rewarded for it with the kingdom of Thebes; some authors interpret the Sphynx into a maritime force, invading Bœotia under the command of a woman, whom Œdipus slew; others pretend that the Sphynx was a natural daughter of Laius, who slew all those Thebans who dared to mention an oracle of Apollo, said to have been given to Cadmus, concerning the succession to the throne, and declaring bastards incapable of inheriting it; the fable says, that she

Thy grateful people saw thee, not by man
But by the gods instructed, save the land;
Now then, thou best of kings, assist us now,
O! by some mortal or immortal aid
Now succour the distrest! on wisdom oft
And prudent counsels, in the hour of ill,
Success awaits; O! dearest prince, support,
Relieve thy Thebes, on thee its saviour once
Again it calls; now, if thou would'st not see
The mem'ry perish of thy former deeds,
Let it not call in vain, but rise, and save!
With happiest omens once and fair success
We saw thee crown'd; O! be thyself again,
And may thy will and fortune be the same!
If thou art yet to reign, O king! remember
A sovereign's riches is a peopled realm;
For what will ships or lofty tow'rs avail
Unarm'd with men to guard and to defend them?

ŒDIPUS.

O! my unhappy sons, too well I know
Your sad estate; I know the woes of Thebes;
And yet amongst you lives not such a wretch
As Œdipus; for O! on me, my children,
Your sorrows press; alas! I feel for you
My people, for myself, for Thebes, for all!
Think not, I slept regardless of your ills;
O! no, with many a tear I wept your fate
And oft in meditation deep revolv'd
How best your peace and safety to restore:
The only med'cine that my thoughts cou'd find
I have administer'd; Menæceus' son,
The noble Creon, went by my command
To Delphos, from Apollo's shrine to know,
What must be done to save this wretched land;

defied them to produce this oracle; but that it was revealed to Œdipus in a dream, who repeated it publicly, and destroyed his sister.

'Tis time he were return'd; I wonder much
At his delay; if, when he comes, your king
Perform not all the God enjoins, then say
He is the worst of men.

PRIEST.

O! king, thy words
Are gracious, and if right these youths inform me,
Creon is here.

ŒDIPUS.

O! Phœbus, grant he come
With tidings cheerful as the smile he wears!

PRIEST.

He is the messenger of good; for see,
His brows are crown'd with laurel.

ŒDIPUS.

We shall soon
Be satisfied; he comes.

SCENE II.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, PRIEST, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

My dearest Creon,
O! say, what answer bear'st thou from the god,
Or good, or ill?

CREON.

Good, very good; for know,

His brows are crown'd with laurel. It was usual for those who, on consulting the oracle of Delphos, had received a favourable answer, to put on a crown of laurel at their return, in token of their success: Creon had reason to look upon his in that light, as it pointed out an immediate remedy for the evil: the sight of the laurel therefore raises the hopes of Œdipus, and consequently heightens his disappointment afterwards. Sophocles, throughout this excellent piece, appears like a fine painter, whose judicious mixture and disposition of light and shade animates and enlivens the picture.

The worst of ills, if rightly us'd, may prove
The means of happiness.

ŒDIPUS.

What says my friend?
This answer gives me nought to hope or fear.

CREON.

Shall we retire, or wou'd you that I speak
In public here?

ŒDIPUS.

Before them all declare it;
Their woes sit heavier on me than my own.

CREON.

Then mark what I have heard: the God commands
That instant we drive forth the fatal cause
Of this dire pestilence, nor nourish here
Th' accursed monster.

ŒDIPUS.

Who? what monster? how
Remove it?

CREON.

Or by banishment, or death;
Life must be giv'n for life; for yet his blood
Rests on the city.

ŒDIPUS.

Whose? what means the god?

CREON.

O! king, before thee Laius rul'd o'er Thebes.

ŒDIPUS.

I know he did, though I did ne'er behold him.

CREON.

Laius was slain, and on his murderers,
So Phœbus says, we must have vengeance.

ŒDIPUS.

Where,
Where are the murd'rers? who shall trace the guilt
Buried so long in silence?

CREON.

Here, he said,

E'en in this land: what's sought for may be found,
But truth unsearch'd for, seldom comes to light.

ŒDIPUS.

How did he fall, and where? at home, abroad,

How did he fall? This, Dacier thinks, is the only objection that can be made to the fable of Œdipus, and which is, in his opinion, insuperable: Aristotle had previously affirmed it to be absolutely necessary, that among all the incidents which compose the fable, no one should be without reason; or, if that be impossible, it ought to be so managed, that what is without reason should be always out of the tragedy, as Sophocles has prudently observed in his Œdipus It was without reason (says Dacier in his comment on this passage of Aristotle) that Œdipus should be so long married to Jocasta, and not know in what manner Laius was killed, or make enquiry after the murderers; but as the subject could not consist without this circumstance, Sophocles has judiciously placed it out of the action; the poet is answerable only for those incidents, which make a part in his subject, and not for those which precede or follow it. Brumoy is of the same opinion with Dacier, and says it is 'un defaut visible, quoique necessaire,' 'a visible though a necessary fault,' that Aristotle therefore has endeavoured to excuse Sophocles as well as he could.

If I had leisure and inclination to turn commentator on this passage before us, I cannot but think it were an easy task, in opposition to the arbitrary decision both of Greek and French critics, to defend Sophocles, and to prove that there is no such glaring absurdity in the supposition of Œdipus's real or pretended ignorance on this occasion: was it the business of Œdipus, of a stranger, who by a lucky concurrence of circumstances was just raised to a throne which he had no right to, to inspect too narrowly into the murder of his predecessor, whom he thought no ways related to him? To make public enquiry might only have raised public commotions; and as to the private intelligence, which he might have had from Jocasta, it was certainly a subject too delicate to be touched on when they first came together, and of very little consequence afterwards: it might indeed be the business of the people, and doubtless would have been, but for a circumstance which seems to have escaped Aristotle and his followers, and is, notwithstanding, an obvious reason for their silence in this particular: we are told, a few lines below, that the Thebans made no enquiry into the murder of Laius, because their attention was otherwise employed:

The Sphynx,
Her dire ænigma kept our thoughts intent
On present ills, nor gave us time to search
The past mysterious deed.

This kept every thing quiet for a time, till the affair by degrees naturally sunk into oblivion.

Died he at Thebes, or in a foreign land?

CREON.

He left his palace, fame reports, to seek
Some oracle; since that, we ne'er beheld him.

ŒDIPUS.

But did no messenger return? not one
Of all his train, of whom we might enquire,
Touching this murder?

CREON.

One, and one alone,
Came back, who, flying, 'scap'd the gen'ral slaughter;
But nothing, save one little circumstance,
Or knew, or e'er related.

ŒDIPUS.

What was that?
Much may be learn'd from that: a little dawn
Of light appearing may discover all.

CREON.

Laius, attack'd by robbers, and oppress'd
By numbers, fell: such is his tale.

ŒDIPUS.

Wou'd they,
Wou'd robbers do so desperate a deed,
Unbrib'd and unassisted?

CREON.

So indeed
Suspicion whisper'd then; but, Laius dead,
No friend was found to vindicate the wrong.

ŒDIPUS.

But what strange cause cou'd stop enquiry thus
Into the murder of a king?

Oppress'd by numbers. This proves afterwards not to be true; for Œdipus was alone when he killed Laius; the servant, notwithstanding, might be supposed to have related the story in this manner, to excuse his own cowardice, and save the honour of his master. This falsehood was necessary to the carrying on of the plot, which would otherwise have been too soon unravelled.

CREON.

The Sphynx;
Her dire ænigma kept our thoughts intent
On present ills, nor gave us time to search
The past mysterious deed.

ŒDIPUS.

Myself will try
Soon to unveil it; thou, Apollo, well,
And well hast thou, my Creon, lent thy aid;
Your Œdipus shall now perform his part;
Yes, I will fight for Phœbus and my country,
And so I ought; for not to friends alone
Or kindred owe I this, but to myself;
Who murder'd him perchance wou'd murder me:
His cause is mine: wherefore, my children, rise,
Take hence your suppliant boughs, and summon here
The race of Cadmus, my assembled people;
Nought shall be left untried: Apollo leads,
And we shall rise to joy or sink for ever.

PRIEST.

Haste then, my sons; for this we hither came;
About it quick, and may the god, who sent
This oracle, protect, defend, and save us! [*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O! thou, great oracle divine,
Who didst to happy Thebes remove

Myself will try, &c. Nothing could be better designed than thus making Œdipus a principal agent in the discovery of his own guilt; every method which he makes use of to promote his ease and safety, tends to his misery and destruction; he endeavours only to find out the murderer of his wife's first husband; that husband proves to be his own father, and himself the murderer of that father; the whole is truly tragical.

Chorus. The critics are much divided in opinion concerning the persons who compose the Chorus of this tragedy The antient Greek Scholiast assures us that the moment the high-priest of Jupiter, with his attendant train of young men, leave the stage at the end of the last scene,

From Delphi's golden shrine,
And in sweet sounds declare the will of Jove;

a certain number of the inhabitants of Thebes enter and form the Chorus; with this opinion of the Scholiast, Mr. Boivin partly agrees; and only adds, that the Chorus consisted of the whole body of the people, who, impatient to hear the answer of the oracle, had assembled together, and crowded towards the palace; that the principal citizens take their places on the stage, and speak by their choragus or chief, the rest standing at some distance: in support of this assertion, Mr. Boivin produces several arguments; the most forcible of which is, that Œdipus, in his address to the Chorus, calls them the citizens of Thebes and descendants of Cadmus: Mr. Dacier, on the other hand, affirms, that on the departure of the high-priest, the other priest and sacrificers, who remain on the stage, compose the Chorus, which is afterwards joined by the people, whom Œdipus had commanded to assemble, and who could not possibly have been got together so quickly as to enter and make a Chorus immediately, according to Boivin: it is much more natural, he says, to suppose that the priests belonging to the several temples, 'οἱ συν γηρα 'βαρεις,' who had heard the conversation between Œdipus and Creon, should join in their invocation to Apollo, requesting him to explain the oracle, and deliver their country. Those who are desirous of entering more minutely into the arguments brought by these gentlemen on both sides of the question, will meet with a summary account of it in the Histoire de l'Academie des Inscriptions & Belles Lettres, tom. 3. p. 108. Brumoy sides with the Scholiast and Boivin, and gives the Chorus the title of antient Thebans; alleging only as his reason, that Jocasta calls them 'χωρας ανακτες 'Princes, or men of the first rank in Thebes;' which perhaps might be applied with equal propriety to the priests.

The learned Dr. Burton, whose Πενταλογια is just come to my hands, has given us, in his excellent and useful notes on the Œdipus Tyrannus, an opinion in some measure differing from, and perhaps preferable to all the rest: he imagines that Œdipus, the high-priest, &c. retiring, the stage is left in possession of the priests, who form the Chorus, and sing the first song or intermede, during the absence of the king, who returns soon after together with the assembled people; that then the priests go out and give place to a new Chorus, composed of the principal citizens of Thebes, who continue on the stage to the end of the drama. This solution of the difficulty is ingenious, but seems to want that kind of confirmation which arises from similitude of practice in the same author; we do not remember any instance in Sophocles of the like conduct with regard to his Chorus. The Dr. indeed says, examples are not wanting, and mentions the hymn to Apollo in the Iphigenia in Tauris of Euripides, as a similar circumstance; but, besides that the cases are not exactly parallel, it may be sufficient to observe, that the conduct of Euripides should by no means determine that of Sophocles, who is infinitely more

Daughter of hope, O! soothe my soul to rest,
And calm the rising tumult in my breast;
Look down, O! Phœbus, on thy lov'd abode;
Speak, for thou know'st the dark decrees of fate,
Our present and our future state,
O! Delian, be thou still our healing God!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Minerva, first on thee I call,
Daughter of Jove, immortal maid,
Low beneath thy feet we fall,
O! bring thy sister Dian to our aid;
Goddess of Thebes, from thy imperial throne
Look with an eye of gentle pity down,
And thou, far-shooting Phœbus, once the friend
Of this unhappy, this devoted land,
O! now, if ever, let thy hand
Once more be stretch'd to save and to defend!

STROPHE II.

Great Thebes, my sons, is now no more,
She falls and ne'er again shall rise,
Nought can her health or strength restore,
The mighty nation sinks, she droops, she dies:

correct and regular in the plan and disposition of every part of his tragedies, than his illustrious rival. If, after the ingenious conjectures of these gentlemen, I were to propose my own on this point, it would be, that the same Chorus continues from the beginning to the end, and that it consisted of the priests and sacrificers, intermingled with the principal and most antient inhabitants of Thebes.

O! thou great oracle, &c. The first intermede or song of the Chorus is a solemn invocation of Apollo and other deities, intreating them to succour Thebes, and pathetically describing the dreadful effects of the pestilence. The whole is, in the original, nobly expressed, and naturally arising from the circumstances of the drama.

The will of Jove. The oracle of Apollo only interpreted the will of Jove, the great father and source of all.

Quæ Phœbo pater omnipotens mihi Phœbus Apollo
Prædixit,

says Virgil. Absurd as the Pagan theology was, we frequently find the antients resolving all power into one Supreme Being, called, particularly in Sophocles, by the name of ‘ Θεὸς, or the God.’

Stripp'd of her fruits behold the barren earth;
The half-form'd infant struggles for a birth;
The mother sinks unequal to her pain:
Whilst quick as birds in airy circles fly,
Or lightnings from an angry sky,
Crowds press on crowds to Pluto's dark domain.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Behold what heaps of wretches slain,
Unburied, unlamented lie,
Nor parents now nor friends remain
To grace their deaths with pious obsequy;
The aged matron and the blooming wife.
Clung to the altars, sue for added life;
With sighs and groans united Pæans rise;
Re-echo'd still doth great Apollo's name
Their sorrows and their wants proclaim,
Frequent to him ascends the sacrifice.

STROPHE III.

Haste then, Minerva, beauteous maid,
Descend in this afflictive hour,
Haste to thy dying people's aid,
Drive hence this baneful, this destructive pow'r!
Who comes not arm'd with hostile sword or shield,
Yet strews with many a corse th' ensanguin'd field;
To Amphitrite's wide-extending bed
O! drive him, Goddess, from thy fav'rite land,
Or let him, by thy dread command,
Bury in Thracian waves his ignominious head.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Father of all, immortal Jove,
O! now thy fiery terrors send;
From thy dreadful stores above
Let lightnings blast him and let thunders rend;
And thou, O! Lydian king, thy aid impart;
Send from thy golden bow, th' unerring dart;

Smile, chaste Diana, on this lov'd abode,
Whilst Theban Bacchus joins the madd'ning throng,
O! God of wine and mirth and song,
Now with thy torch destroy the base inglorious god.
[*Exeunt.*

A C T II.

SCENE I.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS, (THE PEOPLE ASSEMBLED.)

ŒDIPUS.

YOUR pray'rs are heard; and, if you will obey
Your king, and hearken to his words, you soon
Shall find relief; myself will heal your woes:
I was a stranger to the dreadful deed,
A stranger e'en to the report till now;
And yet without some traces of the crime
I shou'd not urge this matter; therefore hear me;
I speak to all the citizens of Thebes,
Myself a citizen; observe me well:
If any know the murd'rer of Laius,
Let him reveal it; I command you all;
But if restrain'd by dread of punishment
He hide the secret, let him fear no more;
For nought but exile shall attend the crime
Whene'er confess'd; if by a foreign hand
The horrid deed was done, who points him out
Commands our thanks, and meets a sure reward;

With thy torch, &c. Bacchus is always described with torches; probably in remembrance of his birth, as being born in flames, when his mother Semele was consumed by Jove's lightning. We read of 'the λαμπτηρια ορτη, or feast of torches,' dedicated to this god. Dacier imagines, that the Chorus invoke Bacchus with his torches, because wine and fire are the best preservatives against the plague: but this seems to be a mere allegorical and visionary refinement.

But if there be who knows the murderer,
And yet conceals him from us, mark his fate,
Which here I do pronounce: let none receive
Throughout my kingdom, none hold converse with him,
Nor offer pray'r, nor sprinkle o'er his head
The sacred cup; let him be driv'n from all,
By all abandon'd, and by all accurs'd,
For so the Delphic oracle declar'd;
And therefore to the gods I pay this duty
And to the dead: O! may the guilty wretch,
Whether alone, or by his impious friends
Assisted, he perform'd the horrid deed,
Denied the common benefits of nature,
Wear out a painful life! and O! if here,
Within my palace, I conceal the traitor,
On me and mine alight the vengeful curse!
To you, my people, I commit the care
Of this important business; 'tis my cause,
The cause of heav'n, and your expiring country;
E'en if the god had nought declar'd, to leave
This crime unexpiated were most ungrateful;
He was the best of kings, the best of men;
That scepter now is mine which Laius bore;

Let none receive, &c. Sophocles has here given us the solemn form of a pagan excommunication, almost as terrible in its circumstances as a pope's bull; this we find frequently denounced against those who were guilty of murder, or any other very heinous crime: the antients believed that nothing could prevent or turn aside such execrations;

——————— dira detestatio
Nullâ expiatur victimâ. HOR. B. 5. Od. 5.

We may judge, therefore, what effect this curse must have had on a superstitious people, when delivered by their sovereign, and how great their horror and astonishment, when he himself becomes the unhappy object of it.

Nor sprinkle o'er his head, &c. Before the sacrifice, it was customary for those, who partook of it, to wash their hands together in the lustral water, with which they were afterwards sprinkled by the priests, by way of purification: to be denied this, was always considered as a mark of guilt and infamy.

His wife is mine; so wou'd his children be
Did any live; and therefore am I bound,
E'en as he were my father, to revenge him;
Yes, I will try to find this murderer,
I owe it to the son of Labdacus,
To Polydorus, Cadmus, and the race
Of great Agenor: O! if yet there are,
Who will not join me in the pious deed,
From such may earth withhold her annual store,
And barren be their bed, their life most wretched,
And their death cruel as the pestilence
That wastes our city! but on you, my Thebans,
Who wish us fair success, may justice smile
Propitious, and the gods for ever bless!

CHORUS.

O! king, thy imprecations unappal'd
I hear, and join thee, guiltless of the crime,
Nor knowing who committed it; the god
Alone, who gave the oracle, must clear
Its doubtful sense, and point out the offender.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis true; but who shall force the pow'rs divine
To speak their hidden purpose?

CHORUS.

One thing more,
If I might speak.

ŒDIPUS.

Say on, whate'er thy mind

So wou'd his children be, &c. By this, the poet means to inform us, that Laius had no other children by Jocasta but Œdipus: it seems indeed essential to this fable, with regard to the constitution of the drama, that it should be so, for reasons sufficiently obvious. Corneille, one of the many unsuccessful followers of Sophocles in this subject, has, notwithstanding, given Laius a daughter by Jocasta, whom he calls Dirce, and makes Theseus in love with her: in the preface to his Œdipus, we find a defence of this episode, which, to the judicious reader, will yet appear absolutely indefeasible.

Say on, &c. In the original, the Chorus says, 'let me give you a se-

Shall dictate to thee.

CHORUS.

As amongst the gods
All-knowing Phœbus, so to mortal men
Doth sage Tiresias in foreknowledge sure
Shine forth pre-eminent; perchance his aid
Might much avail us.

ŒDIPUS.

Creon did suggest
The same expedient, and by his advice
Twice have I sent for this Tiresias; much
I wonder that he comes not.

CHORUS.

'Tis most fitting
We do consult him; for the idle tales
Which rumour spreads are not to be regarded.

ŒDIPUS.

What are those tales? for nought shou'd we despise.

CHORUS.

'Tis said, some trav'llers did attack the king.

ŒDIPUS.

It is; but still no proof appears.

CHORUS.

And yet,
If it be so, thy dreadful execration
Will force the guilty to confess.

ŒDIPUS.

O! no!
Who fears not to commit the crime, will ne'er

'cond advice,' to which Œdipus replies, 'if you have a third, don't 'omit it.' This puts one in mind of Hamlet's odd reply to Rosencraus, 'we shall obey, where she ten times our mother.' Expressions so uncommon, and purely idiomatical, will not admit of a literal translation; I have therefore, in this passage, varied the phrase, and retained only the most probable meaning of it.

By his advice. This circumstance is artfully thrown in by the poet, as it lays a foundation for the suspicion of Œdipus against Creon, and prepares the spectators for the ensuing quarrel between them.

Be frighted at the curse that follows it.

CHORUS.

Behold he comes, who will discover all,
The holy prophet, see! they lead him hither;
He knows the truth and will reveal it to us.

SCENE II.

TIRESIAS, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

O! sage Tiresias, thou who knowest all
That can be known, the things of heav'n above
And earth below, whose mental eye beholds,
Blind as thou art, the state of dying Thebes,
And weeps her fate, to thee we look for aid,
On thee alone for safety we depend:
This answer, which perchance thou hast not heard,
Apollo gave:—the plague, he said, shou'd cease,
When those who murder'd Laius were discover'd
And paid the forfeit of their crime by death,
Or banishment: O! do not then conceal
Aught that thy art prophetic from the flight
Of birds or other omens may disclose;
O! save thyself, save this afflicted city,
Save Œdipus, avenge the guiltless dead
From this pollution! thou art all our hope;
Remember, 'tis the privilege of man,
His noblest function, to assist the wretched

TIRESIAS.

Alas! what misery it is to know,
When knowledge is thus fatal! O! Tiresias,

Blind as thou art. The antients give us various accounts of the cause of Tiresias's blindness. Ovid, who is perhaps the best poetical authority, tells us, that Tiresias, being appointed by Jupiter and Juno to decide a difference between them, gave his opinion in favour of the former; upon which, the enraged Juno deprived him of his sight; and Jupiter, to make him amends, bestowed on him the gift of prophecy.

Thou art undone! wou'd I had never came!

ŒDIPUS.

What say'st thou? whence this strange dejection? speak.

TIRESIAS.

Let me be gone; 'twere better for us both
That I retire in silence; be advis'd.

ŒDIPUS.

It is ingratitude to Thebes, who bore
And cherish'd thee, it is unjust to all,
To hide the will of heav'n.

TIRESIAS.

'Tis rash in thee
To ask, and rash I fear will prove my answer.

CHORUS.

O! do not, by the gods, conceal it from us,
Suppliant we all request, we all conjure thee.

TIRESIAS.

You know not what you ask; I'll not unveil
Your mis'ries to you.

ŒDIPUS.

Know'st thou then our fate,
And wilt not tell it? mean'st thou to betray
Thy country and thy king?

TIRESIAS.

I wou'd not make
Myself and thee unhappy; why thus blame
My tender care, nor listen to my caution?

ŒDIPUS.

Wretch as thou art, thou would'st provoke a stone,
Inflexible and cruel, still implor'd

Thou would'st provoke a stone. This is a close and literal translation of 'πετρα φυσιν συ' οργαναις,' 'vel saxum irritare queas.' The unlearned reader may probably think the expression too low and vulgar for the dignity of the buskin: I have notwithstanding preserved it, because the phrase could not be varied without departing from the original; besides that it serves, amongst many other passages, to point out the remarkable analogy of the Greek language with our own.

And still refusing.

TIRESIAS.

Thou condemn'st my warmth,
Forgetful of thy own.

ŒDIPUS.

Who wou'd not rage
To see an injur'd people treated thus
With vile contempt?

TIRESIAS.

What is decreed by heav'n
Must come to pass, though I reveal it not.

ŒDIPUS.

Still 'tis thy duty to inform us of it.

TIRESIAS.

I'll speak no more, not tho' thine anger swell
E'en to its utmost.

ŒDIPUS.

Nor will I be silent.
I tell thee once for all thou wert thyself
Accomplice in this deed; nay, more, I think,
But for thy blindness, would'st with thy own hand
Have done it too.

TIRESIAS.

'Tis well; now hear Tiresias;
The sentence, which thou didst thyself proclaim,
Falls on thyself; henceforth shall never man
Hold converse with thee, for thou art accurs'd;
The guilty cause of all this city's woes.

ŒDIPUS.

Audacious traitor, think'st thou to escape
The hand of vengeance?

Audacious traitor, &c. The character of Œdipus begins now to open upon us, and display itself: we find him presumptuous, self-sufficient, resentful, and suspicious; his impiety in contemning the prophet of Apollo in this scene, and his groundless accusation of Creon in the next, diminish our pity for his misfortunes, raise a proper degree of terror in the spectators, and reconcile us to his approaching fate.

TIRESIAS.

Yes, I fear thee not;
For truth is stronger than a tyrant's arm,

ŒDIPUS.

Whence didst thou learn this? was it from thy art?

TIRESIAS.

I learn'd it from thyself; thou didst compel me
To speak, unwilling as I was.

ŒDIPUS.

Once more
Repeat it then, that I may know my fate
More plainly still.

TIRESIAS.

Is it not plain already?
Or mean'st thou but to tempt me?

ŒDIPUS.

No; but say,
Speak it again.

TIRESIAS.

Again then I declare
Thou art thyself the murd'rer whom thou seek'st.

ŒDIPUS.

A second time thou shalt not pass unpunish'd.

TIRESIAS.

What woud'st thou say, if I shou'd tell thee all?

ŒDIPUS.

Say what thou wilt; for all is false.

TIRESIAS.

Know then,
That Œdipus, in shameful bonds united
With those he loves, unconscious of his guilt,
Is yet most guilty.

ŒDIPUS.

Dar'st thou utter more,
And hope for pardon?

TIRESIAS.

Yes, if there be strength

In sacred truth.

ŒDIPUS.

But truth dwells not in thee:
Thy body and thy mind are dark alike,
For both are blind; thy ev'ry sense is lost.

TIRESIAS.

Thou dost upbraid me with the loss of that
For which thyself ere long shall meet reproach
From ev'ry tongue.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou blind and impious traitor!
Thy darkness is thy safeguard, or this hour
Had been thy last.

TIRESIAS.

It is not in my fate
To fall by thee; Apollo guards his priest.

ŒDIPUS.

Was this the tale of Creon, or thy own?

TIRESIAS.

Creon is guiltless, and the crime is thine.

ŒDIPUS.

O! riches, pow'r, dominion, and thou far
Above them all, the best of human blessings,
Excelling wisdom, how doth envy love
To follow and oppress you! this fair kingdom,
Which, by the nation's choice, and not my own,
I here possess, Creon, my faithful friend,
For such I thought him once, wou'd now wrest from me,
And hath suborn'd this vile impostor here,
This wand'ring hypocrite, of sharpest sight
When int'rest prompts, but ignorant and blind
When fools consult him; tell me, prophet, where
Was all thy art, when the abhorred Sphynx
Alarm'd our city? wherefore did not then
Thy wisdom save us? then the man divine
Was wanting; but thy birds refus'd their omens,

Thy god was silent; then came Œdipus,
This poor, unlearned, uninstructed sage;
Who not from birds uncertain omens drew,
But by his own sagacious mind explor'd
The hidden mystery; and now thou com'st
To cast me from the throne my wisdom gain'd,
And share with Creon my divided empire:
But you shou'd both lament your ill-got pow'r,
You and your bold compeer; for thee, this moment,
But that I bear respect unto thy age,
I'd make thee rue thy execrable purpose.

CHORUS.

You both are angry, therefore both to blame;
Much rather shou'd you join, with friendly zeal
And mutual ardour, to explore the will
Of all-deciding heav'n.

TIRESIAS.

What though thou rul'st
O'er Thebes despotic, we are equal here;
I am Apollo's subject, and not thine;
Nor want I Creon to protect me. No;
I tell thee, king, this blind Tiresias tells thee,
Seeing thou see'st not, know'st not where thou art,
What, or with whom: canst thou inform me who
Thy parents are, and what thy horrid crimes
'Gainst thy own race, the living and the dead?
A father's and a mother's curse attend thee;
Soon shall their furies drive thee from the land,
And leave thee dark like me; what mountain then,
Or conscious shore, shall not return the groans
Of Œdipus, and echo to his woes?
When thou shalt look on the detested bed,

What mountain then. In the original, it is, what Cithæron? Cithæron was the mountain where Œdipus was exposed when an infant; this, therefore, has a remarkable propriety, but could not be expressed in the translation.

And in that haven, where thou hop'st to rest,
Shalt meet with storm and tempest; then what ills
Shall fall on thee and thine! now vent thy rage
On old Tiresias, and the guiltless Creon;
We shall be soon aveng'd, for ne'er did heav'n
Cut off a wretch so base, so vile as thou art.

ŒDIPUS.

Must I bear this from thee? away, begone,
Home, villain, home.

TIRESIAS.

I did not come to thee
Unsent for.

ŒDIPUS.

Had I thought thou would'st have thus
Insulted me, I had not call'd thee hither.

TIRESIAS.

Perhaps thou hold'st Tiresias as a fool,
And madman; but thy parents thought me wise.

ŒDIPUS.

My parents, said'st thou? speak, who were my parents?

TIRESIAS.

This day, that gives thee life, shall give thee death.

ŒDIPUS.

Still dark, and still perplexing are the words
Thou utter'st.

TIRESIAS.

'Tis thy business to unriddle,

This day, &c. That is, 'this day, which shall discover who thy parents are that gave thee life, shall also, by that discovery, cause thy 'death, when thou shalt be found the murderer of thy father:' he tells him afterwards, that his virtues had undone him, which was literally true, as his wisdom in expounding the riddle of the Sphynx, and his good fortune in being saved by the shepherd in his infancy, gave him the opportunity of committing those crimes which he could otherwise never have been guilty of. The affected obscurity of Tiresias's predictions keeps the spectators in a proper suspense, and, at the same time, throws an air of solemnity over the scene, which renders it more interesting.

And therefore thou canst best interpret them.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou dost reproach me for my virtues.

TIRESIAS.

They,
And thy good fortune, have undone thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Since
I sav'd the city, I'm content.

TIRESIAS.

Farewell.
Boy, lead me hence.

ŒDIPUS.

Away with him, for here
His presence but disturbs us; being gone,
We shall be happier.

TIRESIAS.

Œdipus, I go,
But first inform me, for I fear thee not,
Wherefore I came; know then, I came to tell thee,
The man thou seek'st, the man on whom thou pour'dst
Thy execrations, e'en the murderer
Of Laius, now is here; a seeming stranger
And yet a Theban; he shall suffer soon
For all his crimes; from light and affluence driv'n
To penury and darkness, poor and blind,
Prop'd on his staff, and from his native land
Expell'd; I see him in a foreign clime
A helpless wand'rer; to his sons at once,
A father, and a brother; child, and husband
Of her from whom he sprang: adulterous,
Incestuous parricide, now fare thee well;
Go, learn the truth, and if it be not so,
Say I have ne'er deserv'd the name of prophet.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

When will the guilty wretch appear,
Whom Delphi's sacred oracle demands;
Author of crimes too black for mortal ear,
Dipping in royal blood his sacrilegious hands?
Swift as the storm by rapid whirlwinds driv'n;
Quick let him fly th' impending wrath of heav'n;
For lo! the angry son of Jove,
Arm'd with red lightnings from above,
Pursues the murd'rer with immortal hate,
And round him spreads the snares of unrelenting fate,

ANTISTROPHE I.

From steep Parnassus' rocky cave,
Cover'd with snow, came forth the dread command;
Apollo thence his sacred mandate gave,
To search the man of blood through ev'ry land;
Silent, and sad, the weary wand'rer roves,
O'er pathless rocks, and solitary groves,
Hoping to 'scape the wrath divine,
Denounc'd from great Apollo's shrine;
Vain hopes to 'scape the fate by heav'n decreed;
For vengeance hovers still o'er his devoted head.

STROPHE II.

Tiresias, fam'd for wisdom's lore,
Hath dreadful ills to Œdipus divin'd;
And as his words mysterious I explore,
Unnumber'd doubts perplex my anxious mind,
Now rais'd by hope, and now with fears oppress'd,
Sorrow and joy alternate fill my breast:

When will the guilty, &c. This is the second intermede, or song of the Chorus, who, divided between hope and fear, concerning the murder of Laius, express their sentiments on this occasion: their respect and veneration for the character of Tiresias, incline them to believe him; whilst, on the other hand, their regard for Œdipus would persuade them to question the prophet's veracity; they determine therefore in favour of their sovereign, and conclude him innocent.

How shou'd these hapless kings be foes,
When never strife between them rose?
Or why shou'd Laius, slain by hands unknown,
Bring foul disgrace on Polybus' unhappy son?

ANTISTROPHE II.

From Phœbus and all-seeing Jove
Nought can be hid of actions here below;
But earthly prophets may deceitful prove,
And little more than other mortals know:
Tho' much in wisdom man doth man excel,
In all that's human error still must dwell:
Cou'd he commit the bloody deed,
Who from the Sphynx our city freed?
O! no! he never shed the guiltless blood,
The Sphynx declares him wise, and innocent, and good.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.

CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

O! CITIZENS, with grief I hear your king
Hath blasted the fair fame of guiltless Creon!
And most unjustly brands me with a crime
My soul abhors: whilst desolation spreads
On ev'ry side, and universal ruin
Hangs o'er the land, if I in word or deed
Cou'd join to swell the woes of hapless Thebes,
I were unworthy, nay, I wou'd not wish
To live another day: alas, my friends,

Polybus' unhappy son. This circumstance pleads strongly in favour of Œdipus, who is still supposed to be the son of Polybus; it was not therefore probable, that he should murder a man who had never injured him, and with whom he could have no connection.

Thus to be deem'd a traitor to my country,
To you my fellow-citizens, to all
That hear me! 'tis infamy and shame;
I cannot, will not bear it.

CHORUS.

'Twas th' effect
Of sudden anger only, what he said
But cou'd not think

CREON.

Who told him I suborn'd
The prophet to speak falsely? what cou'd raise
This vile suspicion?

CHORUS.

Such he had, but whence
I know not.

CREON.

Talk'd he thus with firm composure
And confidence of mind?

CHORUS.

I cannot say;
'Tis not for me to know the thoughts of kings,
Or judge their actions; but behold, he comes.

SCENE II.

ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! Creon here? and dar'st thou thus approach
My palace, thou who would'st have murder'd me,
And ta'en my kingdom? by the gods I ask thee,
Answer me, traitor, did'st thou think me fool,
Or coward, that I cou'd not see thy arts,
Or had not strength to vanquish them? what madness,
What strange infatuation led thee on,
Without or force, or friends, to grasp at empire,
Which only their united force can give?
What wert thou doing?

CREON.

Hear what I shall answer,
Then judge impartial.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou canst talk it well,
But I shall ne'er attend to thee; thy guilt
Is plain; thou art my deadliest foe.

CREON.

But hear
What I shall urge.

ŒDIPUS.

Say not thou'rt innocent.

CREON.

If self-opinion void of reason seem
Conviction to thee, know, thou err'st most grossly.

ŒDIPUS.

And thou more grossly, if thou think'st to pass
Unpunish'd for this inj'ry to thy friend.

CREON.

I shou'd not, were I guilty; but what crime
Have I committed? tell me.

ŒDIPUS.

Wert not thou
The man who urg'd me to require the aid
Of your all-knowing prophet?

CREON.

True, I was;
I did persuade you; so I wou'd again.

ŒDIPUS.

How long is it since Laius—

CREON.

Laius? what?

ŒDIPUS.

Since Laius fell by hands unknown?

CREON.

A long,
Long tract of years.

ŒDIPUS.

Was this Tiresias then
A prophet?

CREON.

Aye! in wisdom and in fame
As now excelling.

ŒDIPUS.

Did he then say aught
Concerning me?

CREON.

I never heard he did.

ŒDIPUS.

Touching this murder, did you ne'er enquire
Who were the authors?

CREON.

Doubtless: but in vain.

ŒDIPUS.

Why did not this same prophet then inform you?

CREON.

I know not that, and when I'm ignorant
I'm always silent.

ŒDIPUS.

What concerns thyself
At least thou know'st, and therefore should'st declare it.

CREON.

What is it? speak; and if 'tis in my pow'r,
I'll answer thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou know'st, if this Tiresias
Had not combin'd with thee, he wou'd not thus
Accuse me, as the murderer of Laius.

CREON.

What he declares, thou best canst tell: of me,
What thou requir'st, myself am yet to learn.

ŒDIPUS.

Go, learn it then; but ne'er shalt thou discover,
That Œdipus is guilty.

CREON.

Art not thou
My sister's husband?

ŒDIPUS.

Granted.

CREON.

Join'd with her,
Thou rul'st o'er Thebes.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis true, and all she asks
Most freely do I give her.

CREON.

Is not Creon
In honour next to you?

ŒDIPUS.

Thou art; and therefore
The more ungrateful.

CREON.

Hear what I shall plead,
And thou wilt never think so: tell me, prince,
Is there a man, who wou'd prefer a throne
With all its dangers, to an equal rank
In peace and safety? I am not of those
Who choose the name of king before the pow'r;
Fools only make such wishes: I have all
From thee, and fearless I enjoy it all:
Had I the sceptre, often must I act
Against my will; know then, I am not yet
So void of sense and reason, as to quit
A real 'vantage for a seeming good:
Am I not happy, am I not rever'd,

Join'd with her, &c. Creon, as brother to the queen, and presumptive heir to the crown after the death of Laius, had reason to think himself aggrieved by the marriage of Œdipus, and his succession to the kingdom of Thebes; a circumstance which, though unobserved by the commentators, accounts in a most probable manner for the strong suspicions of the one, and the warm resentment of the other.

Embrac'd, and lov'd by all? to me they come
Who want thy favour, and by me acquire it:
What then should Creon wish for; shall he leave
All this for empire? bad desires corrupt
The fairest mind: I never entertain'd
A thought so vile, nor wou'd I lend my aid
To forward such base purposes: but go
To Delphos, ask the sacred oracle
If I have spoke the truth; if there you find
That with the prophet I conspir'd, destroy
The guilty Creon; not thy voice alone
Shall then condemn me, for myself will join
In the just sentence; but accuse me not
On weak suspicion's most uncertain test;
Justice wou'd never call the wicked good,
Or brand fair virtue with the name of vice,
Unmerited: to cast away a friend
Faithful and just, is to deprive ourselves
Of life and being, which we hold most dear:
But time and time alone revealeth all;
That only shews the good man's excellence:
A day sufficeth to unmask the wicked.

CHORUS.

O! king, his caution merits your regard;
Who judge in haste do seldom judge aright.

ŒDIPUS.

When they are quick who plot against my life,
'Tit fit I shou'd be quick in my defence;
If I am tame and silent, all they wish
Will soon be done, and Œdipus must fall.

CREON.

What would'st thou have? my banishment?

ŒDIPUS.

Thy death.

CREON.

But first inform me wherefore I shou'd die.

ŒDIPUS.

Dost thou rebel then? wilt thou not submit?

CREON.

Not when I see thee thus deceiv'd.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis fit
I shou'd defend my own.

CREON.

And so shou'd I.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou art a traitor.

CREON.

What if it shou'd prove
I am not so.

ŒDIPUS.

A king must be obey'd.

CREON.

Not if his orders are unjust.

ŒDIPUS.

O! Thebes!
O! citizens!

CREON.

I too can call on Thebes;
She is my country.

CHORUS.

O! no more, my lords,

Not if his orders are unjust. This republican sentiment, though extremely well adapted to an Athenian audience, is but ill suited to the taste of an arbitrary government. Mr. Dacier has therefore, with the true spirit of a Frenchman, apologised in his notes, for this freedom; he observes, that the Christian religion teaches us to obey not only good, but the worst of princes; and asserts, that to oblige kings to give a reason for their actions, is the highest injustice, being in fact no less a crime than to turn kings into subjects, and subjects into kings: were an Englishman to comment on this passage, he would perhaps be of a direct contrary opinion, and prefer the sentiment of Sophocles to that of the French critic.

For see, Jocasta comes in happiest hour
To end your contest.

SCENE III.

JOCASTA, CREON, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

JOCASTA.

Whence this sudden tumult?
O! princes, is this well? at such a time
With idle broils to multiply the woes
Of wretched Thebes? Home, home, for shame, nor thus
With private quarrels swell the public ruin.

CREON.

Sister, thy husband hath most basely us'd me;
He threatens me with banishment or death.

ŒDIPUS.

I do confess it; for he did conspire
With vile and wicked arts against my life.

CREON.

O! may I never prosper, but accurs'd,
Unpitied, perish if I ever did.

JOCASTA.

Believe him, Œdipus; revere the gods
Whom he contests, if thou dost love Jocasta;
Thy subjects beg it of thee.

CHORUS.

Hear, O! king;
Consider, we entreat thee.

ŒDIPUS.

What would'st have?
Think you I'll e'er submit to him?

CHORUS.

Revere
His character, his oath, both pleading for him.

ŒDIPUS.

But know you what you ask?

CHORUS.

We do.

ŒDIPUS.

What is it?

CHORUS.

We ask thee to believe a guiltless friend,
Nor cast him forth dishonour'd thus, on slight
Suspicion's weak surmise.

ŒDIPUS.

Requesting this,
You do request my banishment, or death.

CHORUS.

No; by yon leader of the heavenly host,
Th' immortal sun, I had not such a thought;
I only felt for Thebes' distressful state,
And wou'd not have it by domestic strife
Embitter'd thus.

ŒDIPUS.

Why, let him then depart:
If Œdipus must die, or leave his country,
For shameful exile, be it so; I yield
To thy request, not his; for hateful still
Shall Creon ever be.

CREON.

Thy stubborn soul
Bends with reluctance, and when anger fires it
Is terrible; but natures form'd like thine
Are their own punishment.

ŒDIPUS.

Wilt thou not hence?
Wilt not be gone?

CREON.

I go; thou know'st me not;
But these will do me justice. [*Exit* CREON.

SCENE IV.

JOCASTA ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Princess, now,
Persuade him to retire,

JOCASTA.

First, let me know
The cause of this dissention.

CHORUS.

From reports
Uncertain, and suspicions most injurious,
The quarrel rose.

JOCASTA.

Was th' accusation mutual?

CHORUS,

It was.

JOCASTA.

What follow'd then?

CHORUS.

Ask me no more;
Enough's already known; we'll not repeat
The woes of hapless Thebes.

ŒDIPUS,

You are all blind,
Insensible, unjust; you love me not,
Yet boast your piety.

CHORUS.

I said before,
Again I say, that not to love my king
E'en as myself, wou'd mark me for the worst
Of men; for thou did'st save expiring Thebes:
O! rise once more, protect, preserve thy country!

JOCASTA.

O! king, inform me, whence this strange dissention?

ŒDIPUS.

I'll tell thee, my Jocasta, for thou know'st
The love I bear thee, what this wicked Creon
Did artfully devise against me.

JOCASTA.

Speak it,
If he indeed be guilty.

ŒDIPUS.

Creon says
That I did murder Laius.

JOCASTA.

Spake he this,
As knowing it himself, or from another?

ŒDIPUS.

He had suborn'd that evil-working priest;
And sharpens ev'ry tongue against his king.

JOCASTA.

Let not a fear perplex thee, Œdipus;
Mortals know nothing of futurity,
And these prophetic seers are all impostors;
I'll prove it to thee: know then, Laius once
Not from Apollo, but his priests, receiv'd
An oracle, which said, it was decreed
He shou'd be slain by his own son, the offspring
Of Laius and Jocasta; yet he fell
By strangers, murder'd, for so fame reports,
By robbers, in the place where three ways meet;
A son was born, but ere three days had past,
The infant's feet were bor'd; a servant took
And left him on the pathless mountain's top,
To perish there; thus Phœbus ne'er decreed
That he shou'd kill his father, or that Laius,
Which much he fear'd, shou'd by his son be slain:
Such is the truth of oracles; henceforth
Regard them not; what heav'n wou'd have us know,
It can with ease unfold, and will reveal it.

ŒDIPUS.

What thou hast said, Jocasta, much disturbs me;
I tremble at it.

JOCASTA.

Wherefore should'st thou fear?

ŒDIPUS.

Methought I heard thee say, Laius was slain
Where three ways meet.

JOCASTA.

'Twas so reported then,
And is so still.

ŒDIPUS.

Where happen'd the misfortune?

JOCASTA.

In Phocis, where the roads unite that lead
To Delphi and to Daulia.

ŒDIPUS.

How long since?

JOCASTA.

A little time ere you began to reign
O'er Thebes, we heard it.

ŒDIPUS.

O! almighty Jove!
What wilt thou do with me?

JOCASTA.

Why talk'st thou thus?

ŒDIPUS.

Ask me no more; but tell me of this Laius,

What thou hast said, &c. The conduct of the fable, throughout this play, cannot be sufficiently admired; every thing advanced by Jocasta, to destroy the force of the oracle, tends to confirm it; and every argument, which she brings to remove the fears of Œdipus, increases them: the whole visibly calculated to impress this moral and religious truth on the minds of the audience, viz. that whatever is decreed by divine providence must inevitably come to pass; and that all the means, which are made use of by men to counteract its designs, do, in the end, only promote and forward the accomplishment of them: nothing can be more interesting than the following scene between Œdipus and Jocasta.

What was his age, and stature?

JOCASTA.

He was tall;
His hairs just turning to the silver hue;
His form not much unlike thy own.

ŒDIPUS.

O! me!
Sure I have call'd down curses on myself
Unknowing.

JOCASTA.

Ha! what say'st thou, Œdipus!
I tremble whilst I look on thee.

ŒDIPUS.

O! much
I fear, the prophet saw too well; but say,
One thing will make it clear.

JOCASTA.

I dread to hear it;
Yet speak, and I will tell thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Went he forth
With few attendants, or a num'rous train,
In kingly pomp?

JOCASTA.

They were but five in all;
The herald with them; but one chariot there,
Which carried Laius.

With few attendants. Dacier laughs, with some reason, at the absurdity of Seneca, who, in his ridiculous refinement on Sophocles, equips Laius with a large retinue; but informs us, that great part of his guards lost their way, and left his Majesty with only two or three footmen in a bye-place. 'Voila (says the French critic) une belle invention, de faire 'égarer les gardes dans un voyage de Thebes à Delphes, cest à dire, 'dans un chemin aussi connue que celui de Paris à Versailles, & presqu' 'aussi frequenté.' Mr. Dacier is right in his criticism; but to expose the errors of Seneca would be an endless and unnecessary task; the truest idea of the merit of Sophocles might perhaps be formed by an accurate comparison of his Œdipus with that of his Roman rival.

ŒDIPUS.

O! 'tis but too plain:
Who brought the news?

JOCASTA.

A servant, who alone
Escap'd with life.

ŒDIPUS.

That servant, is he here?

JOCASTA.

O! no! his master slain, when he return'd
And saw thee on the throne of Thebes, with pray'r
Most earnest he beseech'd me to dismiss him,
That he might leave this city, where he wish'd
No longer to be seen, but to retire,
And feed my flocks; I granted his request;
For that and more his honest services
Had merited.

ŒDIPUS.

I beg he may be sent for
Immediately.

JOCASTA.

He shall; but wherefore is it?

ŒDIPUS.

I fear thou'st said too much, and therefore wish
To see him.

JOCASTA.

He shall come; but, O! my lord,
Am I not worthy to be told the cause
Of this distress?

ŒDIPUS.

Thou art, and I will tell thee;
Thou art my hope; to whom shou'd I impart
My sorrows, but to thee? Know then, Jocasta,
I am the son of Polybus, who reigns
At Corinth, and the Dorian Merope
His queen; there long I held the foremost rank,
Honour'd and happy, when a strange event,

(For strange it was, tho' little meriting
The deep concern I felt) alarm'd me much;
A drunken rev'ller at a feast proclaim'd
That I was only the supposed son
Of Corinth's king; scarce cou'd I bear that day
The vile reproach; the next, I sought my parents,
And ask'd of them the truth; they too, enrag'd,
Resented much the base indignity;
I lik'd their tender warmth, but still I felt
A secret anguish, and unknown to them,
Sought out the Pythian oracle; in vain;
Touching my parents, nothing cou'd I learn;
But dreadful were the mis'ries it denounc'd
Against me; 'twas my fate, Apollo said,
To wed my mother, to produce a race
Accursed and abhorr'd; and last, to slay
My father who begat me; sad decree!
Lest I shou'd e'er fulfill the dire prediction,
Instant I fled from Corinth, by the stars
Guiding my hapless journey to the place
Where thou report'st this wretched king was slain;
But I will tell thee the whole truth; at length
I came to where the three ways meet; when, lo!
A herald, with another man like him
Whom thou describ'st, and in a chariot, met me;
Both strove with violence to drive me back;
Enrag'd, I struck the charioteer, when straight,
As I advanc'd, the old man saw, and twice

By the stars, &c. Most of the commentators on this passage have considered it merely as a proverbial expression, applied in general to all who made long and dangerous journeys, and only alluding to the custom of navigators, who were directed in their voyages by the stars; but as astronomy was in great esteem amongst the antients, it is perhaps most probable that they guided themselves by land, as well as by sea, according to the course and situation of those luminaries: there is therefore no occasion to have recourse to a proverb for the expression, especially as the method of travelling is in practice, in some parts of the world, even to this day.

Smote me o' th' head, but dearly soon repaid
The insult on me; from his chariot roll'd
Prone on the earth, beneath my staff he fell,
And instantly expir'd: th' attendant train
All shar'd his fate: if this unhappy stranger
And Laius be the same, lives there a wretch
So curs'd, so hateful to the gods as I am?
Nor citizen nor alien must receive,
Or converse, or communion hold with me,
But drive me forth with infamy and shame;
The dreadful curse pronounc'd with my own lips
Shall soon o'ertake me: I have stain'd the bed
Of him whom I had murder'd; am I then
Aught but pollution? if I fly from hence,
The bed of incest meets me, and I go
To slay my father Polybus, the best,
The tend'rest parent; this must be the work
Of some malignant pow'r: ye righteous gods,
Let me not see that day, but rest in death,
Rather than suffer such calamity.

CHORUS.

O! king, we pity thy distress; but wait
With patience his arrival, and despair not.

ŒDIPUS.

That shepherd is my only hope: Jocasta,
Wou'd he were here!

JOCASTA.

Suppose he were; what then?
What would'st thou do?

My father Polybus, &c. The plot advances gradually, and as it were insensibly, to the utmost point of perfection: Œdipus is already but too well convinced that he is the murderer of Laius, but still believes himself the son of Polybus and Merope. If the casual murder of a stranger, and the marriage of his widow, makes him so unhappy, what will be his condition, when he discovers that stranger to be his father, and that widow, his mother?

His arrival. The arrival of the shepherd mentioned by Jocasta, whom we shall find of signal service in keeping up the attention of the spectators and protracting the catastrophe.

ŒDIPUS.

I'll tell thee; if he says
The same as thou dost, I am safe, and guiltless.

JOCASTA.

What said I, then?

ŒDIPUS.

Thou said'st he did report
Laius was slain by robbers; if 'tis true
He fell by numbers, I am innocent,
For I was unattended; if but one
Attack'd and slew him, doubtless I am he.

JOCASTA.

Be satisfied it must be as he first
Reported it; he cannot change the tale;
Not I alone, but the whole city heard it:
Or grant he shou'd, the oracle was ne'er
Fulfill'd; for Phœbus said, Jocasta's son
Shou'd slay his father; that cou'd never be;
For, O! Jocasta's son long since is dead;
He cou'd not murder Laius; therefore, never
Will I attend to prophecies again.

ŒDIPUS.

Right, my Jocasta; but, I beg thee, send
And fetch this shepherd; do not fail.

JOCASTA.

I will
This moment; come, my lord, let us go in;
I will do nothing but what pleases thee. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Grant me henceforth, ye pow'rs divine,
In virtue's purest paths to tread!

Grant me henceforth, &c. This is the third intermede or song of the Chorus; who, shocked at the impiety of Jocasta, in questioning the truth

In ev'ry word, in ev'ry deed,
May sanctity of manners ever shine!
Obedient to the laws of Jove,
The laws descended from above,
Which, not like those by feeble mortals giv'n,
Buried in dark oblivion lie,
Or worn by time decay, and die,
But bloom eternal like their native heav'n!

ANTISTROPHE II.

Pride first gave birth to tyranny:
That hateful vice, insulting pride,
When, ev'ry human pow'r defy'd,
She lifts to glory's height her votary;
Soon stumbling, from her tott'ring throne
She throws the wretched victim down:
But may the god indulgent hear my pray'r,
That god whom humbly I adore,
O! may he smile on Thebes once more,
And take it's wretched monarch to his care!

STROPHE II.

Perish the impious and profane,
Who, void of reverential fear,
Nor justice, nor the laws revere,
Who leave their god for pleasure or for gain!
Who swell by fraud their ill-got store,
Who rob the wretched and the poor!
If vice unpunish'd virtue's meed obtain,
Who shall refrain the impetuous soul,
The rebel passions who controul,
Or wherefore do I lead this choral train?

of the oracle, agreeably to their office and character, declare their abhorrence of such presumption, and deprecate the wrath of the gods, which must inevitably fall on the delinquent: the whole is full of noble and religious sentiments adapted to the subject.

Perish the impious, &c. This apparently glances at the conduct of Jocasta in the preceding scene; though the Chorus, out of respect to their sovereign, express themselves in general terms, and rather seem to exculpate themselves than to accuse her.

If vice unpunish'd, &c. 'If vice, says the Chorus, meets with the re-

ANTISTROPHE II.

No more to Delphi's sacred shrine
Need we with incense now repair
No more shall Phocis hear our pray'r;
Nor fair Olympia see her rites divine;
If oracles no longer prove
The pow'r of Phœbus and of Jove:
Great lord of all, from thy eternal throne
Behold, how impious men defame
Thy lov'd Apollo's honour'd name;
O! guard his rights, and vindicate thy own. [*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

JOCASTA, CHORUS.

JOCASTA.

Sages and rulers of the land, I come
To seek the altars of the gods, and there

'ward of virtue, who will be good and virtuous, or why should we sa-
'crifice to the gods?' We meet with a parallel passage in holy writ.
'I was grieved at the wicked (says David) I do see the ungodly in
'such prosperity, these prosper in the world, and these have riches in
'possession; and I said, then have I cleansed my heart in vain, and
'washed my hands in innocency.' Psal. lxxiii.

No more to Delphi's, &c. It was usual to depute certain priests from every temple to carry offerings to the temple of Apollo, and to assist at the assemblies of Greece, particularly at Olympia, or Pisa, a city of Elis in the Peloponnesus, famous for the Olympic games, and the temple of Jupiter.

Sages and rulers, &c. The title of Αναχτες, or rulers, with which Jocasta salutes the Chorus, plainly points out to us the age and dignity of those who composed it, being only given to the guardians and defenders of their country. Jocasta, we see, alarmed at the despondency and miserable condition of Œdipus, enters with boughs of supplication in her hand, and is going with great humility to the temples of the gods, whose oracles she had just before treated with contempt: so natural is the transition from open impiety and presumption to servile fears, and enthusiastic superstition.

With incense and oblations to appease
Offended heav'n: my Œdipus, alas!
No longer wise and prudent, as you all
Remember once he was, with present things
Compares the past, nor judges like himself;
Unnumber'd cares perplex his anxious mind,
And ev'ry tale awakes new terrors in him;
Vain is my counsel, for he hears me not.
First then, to thee, O! Phœbus, for thou still
Art near to help the wretched, we appeal;
And suppliant beg thee now to grant thy aid
Propitious; deep is our distress; for, O!
We see our pilot sinking at the helm,
And much already fear the vessel lost.

SCENE II.

SHEPHERD FROM CORINTH, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

SHEPHERD.

Can you instruct me, strangers, which way lies
The palace of king Œdipus; himself
I wou'd most gladly see; can you inform me?

CHORUS.

This is the palace; he is now within;
Thou see'st his queen before thee.

SHEPHERD.

Ever blest
And happy with the happy may'st thou live!

First then to thee, &c. The words 'αγχιστος γαρ ει,' 'thou art the nearest,' have puzzled the commentators. I have ventured to give them a figurative sense, as most agreeable to the context. There is, I think, a propriety in her first and particular application to Apollo on this occasion, as it was probably meant to make amends for her former impiety and contempt of him.

With the happy, &c. There is something remarkable in this wish; 'may'st thou live, not only happy thyself, but with those who are so!'

JOCASTA.

Stranger, the same good wish to thee, for well
Thy words deserve it; but say, wherefore com'st thou,
And what's thy news?

SHEPHERD.

To thee, and to thy huband,
Pleasure, and joy.

JOCASTA.

What pleasure? and whence art thou?

SHEPHERD.

From Corinth: to be brief, I bring thee tidings
Of good and evil.

JOCASTA.

Ha! what mean thy words
Ambiguous?

SHEPHERD.

Know then, if report say true,
The Isthmian people will choose Œdipus
Their sov'reign.

JOCASTA.

Is not Polybus their king?

SHEPHERD.

No; Polybus is dead.

JOCASTA.

What say'st thou? dead?

Sophocles knew that a good mind, even in the midst of affluence, could enjoy no felicity, whilst there were scenes of misery and distress before it; and that all human happiness is increased by participation.

The Isthmian people. The people of Corinth; so called from the famous Isthmus there.

Polybus is dead. This peripetie, or change of fortune, arising so naturally, and so agreeably bringing on the catastrophe, has been deservedly celebrated by the critics: the news of Polybus's death, and the discovery of his not being the father of Œdipus, instead of delivering that unfortunate king from all his fears, becomes the means of displaying his guilt, and involving him in ruin and destruction: nothing, as Aristotle observes, can be more completely tragical.

SHEPHERD.

If I speak falsly, may death seize on me!

JOCASTA *(to one of her* ATTENDANTS.)

Why fly'st thou not to tell thy master? hence!
What are you now, you oracles divine!
Where is your truth? the fearful Œdipus,
From Corinth fled, lest he should slay the king,
This Polybus, who perish'd, not by him,
But by the hand of heav'n.

SCENE III.

ŒDIPUS, JOCASTA, SHEPHERD, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

My dear Jocasta,
Why hast thou call'd me hither?

JOCASTA.

Hear this man,
And when thou hear'st him, mark what faith is due
To your revered oracles.

ŒDIPUS.

Who is he?
And what doth he report?

JOCASTA.

He comes from Corinth;
And says, thy father Polybus is dead.

ŒDIPUS.

What say'st thou, stranger? speak to me, O speak!

SHEPHERD.

If touching this thou first desir'st my answer;
Know, he is dead.

ŒDIPUS.

How died he? say, by treason,
Or some disease?

SHEPHERD.

Alas! a little force

Will lay to rest the weary limbs of age.

ŒDIPUS.

Distemper then did kill him?

SHEPHERD.

That in part,
And part a length of years that wore him down.

ŒDIPUS.

Now, my Jocasta, who shall henceforth trust
To prophecies, and seers, and clam'rous birds
With their vain omens: they who had decreed
That I shou'd kill my father? he, thou see'st
Beneath the earth lies buried, whilst I live
In safety here, and guiltless of his blood:
Unless perhaps sorrow for loss of me
Shorten'd his days, thus only cou'd I kill
My father; but he's gone, and to the shades
Hath carried with him those vain oracles
Of fancied ills, no longer worth my care.

JOCASTA.

Did I not say it wou'd be thus?

ŒDIPUS.

Thou didst;
But I was full of fears.

JOCASTA.

Henceforth, no more
Indulge them.

ŒDIPUS.

But my mother's bed —— that still

Unless perhaps, &c. This is merely as it were in triumph over the prediction, and as a circumstance too ridiculous to deserve attention. As soon as Œdipus is acquainted with the death of Polybus, his supposed father, he sides with Jocasta, and laughs at the oracle; the event, however, proved the folly of this contempt and impiety, and conveys at the same time this useful lesson to mankind, viz. that nothing is to be doubted, ridiculed, or called in question, that comes from heaven, how disputable soever it may appear in the eyes of men, who are unable to comprehend it. If the antient drama may be thought by some to fall short of the modern in some less important points, we must at least acknowledge it, with regard to morality infinitely superior to our own.

Must be avoided: I must fly from that,

JOCASTA.

Why shou'd man fear, whom chance, and chance alone
Doth ever rule? Foreknowledge all is vain,
And can determine nothing; therefore best
It is to live as fancy leads, at large,
Uncurb'd, and only subject to our will.
Fear not thy mother's bed: oft times in dreams
Have men committed incest; but his life
Will ever be most happy, who contemns
Such idle phantoms.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou wert right, Jocasta,
Did not my mother live; but as it is,
Spite of thy words, I must be anxious still.

JOCASTA.

Think on thy father's death, it is a light
To guide thee here.

ŒDIPUS.

It is so; yet I fear
Whilst she survives him.

SHEPHERD.

Who is it you mean?
What woman fear you?

Why shou'd man fear, &c. Jocasta had already treated the oracle of Apollo with contempt; we are not therefore surprised at the impiety of this sentiment, which has been embraced by the despisers of religion from the earliest period of time to this day. When men are once persuaded that chance and not providence rules all things here below, they naturally conclude themselves at liberty to follow their own inclinations, without the least regard to the will of heaven, 'Let us eat and drink, 'for to-morrow we die.' The discovery of Jocasta's guilt, and her immediate punishment was apparently designed by Sophocles as a lesson to the free-thinkers of his age, and may afford no unprofitable admonition to those of our own.

It is a light, &c. The expression, in the original, is something singular, μεγας οφθαλμος ὁι πατρος ταφοι,' 'the tomb of thy father, is a great 'eye;' i. e. an eye by which thou may'st see how little oracles are to be confided in, which with regard to him have already proved false.

ŒDIPUS.

Merope, the wife
Of Polybus.

SHEPHERD.

And wherefore fear you her?

ŒDIPUS.

Know, stranger, a most dreadful oracle
Concerning her affrights me.

SHEPHERD.

May I know it,
Or must it be reveal'd to none but thee?

ŒDIPUS.

O! no! I'll tell thee; Phœbus hath declar'd
That Œdipus shou'd stain his mother's bed,
And dip his hands in his own father's blood;
Wherefore I fled from Corinth, and liv'd here,
In happiness indeed; but still thou know'st
It is a blessing to behold our parents,
And that I had not.

SHEPHERD.

Was it for this cause
Thou wert an exile then?

ŒDIPUS.

It was; I fear'd
That I might one day prove my father's murd'rer.

SHEPHERD.

What if I come, O! king, to banish hence
Thy terrors, and restore thy peace.

ŒDIPUS.

O! stranger,
Could'st thou do this, I wou'd reward thee nobly.

SHEPHERD.

Know then, for this I came; I came to serve,
And make thee happy.

ŒDIPUS.

But I will not go
Back to my parents.

SHEPHERD.

Son, I see thou know'st not
What thou art doing.

ŒDIPUS.

Wherefore think'st thou so?
By heav'n I beg thee then do thou instruct me.

SHEPHERD.

If thou did'st fly from Corinth for this cause—

ŒDIPUS.

Apollo's dire predictions still affright me.

SHEPHERD.

Fear'st thou pollution from thy parents?

ŒDIPUS.

That,
And that alone I dread.

SHEPHERD.

Thy fears are vain.

ŒDIPUS.

Not if they are my parents.

SHEPHERD.

Polybus
Was not a-kin to thee.

Son, &c. Dacier observes on this passage, that the age and condition of the shepherd, who had saved Œdipus in his infancy, might entitle him to the use of this appellation; but remarks, at the same time, that such familiarity from a shepherd to a king, would not suit with French manners, nor the expression be admitted in the French tongue. Abhorrent however as it may be to a French ear, it is by no means disagreeable to an English one, as the frequent use of it in Shakespear and other writers sufficiently confirm.

If thou did'st fly, &c. This is a continuation of the Shepherd's last speech, who pursues his sentiment without regard to the intervening request of Œdipus.

Polybus was not a-kin, &c. One may easily conceive the powerful effect, which this first discovery must have had on the mind of Œdipus, and how finely and gradually it prepares the terrible and affecting catastrophe. Aristotle has with great truth therefore observed, that nothing could be better imagined than the circumstance before us. See his Art of Poetry, chap. xi.

ŒDIPUS.

What say'st thou? Speak;
Say, was not Polybus my father?

SHEPHERD.

No;
No more than he is mine.

ŒDIPUS.

Why call me then
His son?

SHEPHERD.

Because long since I gave thee to him,
He did receive thee from these hands.

ŒDIPUS.

Indeed!
And cou'd he love another's child so well?

SHEPHERD.

He had no children; that persuaded him
To take and keep thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Did'st thou buy me, then,
Or am I thine, and must I call thee father?

SHEPHERD.

I found thee in Cithæron's woody vale.

ŒDIPUS.

What brought thee there?

SHEPHERD.

I came to feed my flocks
On the green mountain's side.

ŒDIPUS.

It seems thou wert
A wand'ring shepherd.

SHEPHERD.

Thy deliverer;
I sav'd thee from destruction.

No more than he is mine. In the original, here follow two lines, which have either no meaning at all, or a very foolish one, and which I have therefore omitted in the translation.

ŒDIPUS.

How! what then
Had happen'd to me?

SHEPHERD.

Thy own feet will best
Inform thee of that circumstance.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas!
Why call'st thou to remembrance a misfortune
Of so long date?

SHEPHERD.

'Twas I who loos'd the tendons
Of thy bored feet.

ŒDIPUS.

It seems in infancy
I suffer'd much then.

SHEPHERD.

To this incident
Thou ow'st thy name.

ŒDIPUS.

My father, or my mother,
Who did it? know'st thou?

SHEPHERD.

He, who gave thee to me,
Must tell thee that.

ŒDIPUS.

Then from another's hand
Thou did'st receive me.

SHEPHERD.

Aye, another shepherd.

Thou ow'st thy name. Οἰδιπους, or Œdipus, signifies in the Greek, swelled-foot, 'δια το οιδειν τους ποδας,' 'tumore nactus nomen ac vitio pedum,' (says Seneca) 'taking his name from the sore and swelling of his foot.' This remarkable circumstance, which so strongly confirms the shepherd's veracity, awakens the suspicions, and raises the curiosity of Œdipus, who proceeds from question to question, to a full conviction of his own guilt and misery.

ŒDIPUS.

Who was he? Canst thou recollect?

SHEPHERD.

'Twas one,
At least so call'd, of Laius' family.

ŒDIPUS.

Laius, who rul'd at Thebes?

SHEPHERD.

The same; this man
Was shepherd to king Laius.

ŒDIPUS.

Lives he still,
And cou'd I see him?

SHEPHERD *(pointing to the* CHORUS.)

Some of these perhaps
His countrymen may give you information.

ŒDIPUS *(to the* CHORUS.)

O! speak, my friends, if any of you know
This shepherd; whether still he lives at Thebes
Or in some neighb'ring country; tell me quick,
For it concerns us near.

CHORUS.

It must be he
Whom thou did'st lately send for; but the queen
Can best inform thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Know'st thou, my Jocasta,
Whether the man whom thou did'st order hither,
And whom the shepherd speaks of, be the same?

JOCASTA.

Whom meant he? for I know not. Œdipus,

Whom meant he? Jocasta, already but too well acquainted with the horrid truth, is reduced to a state of stupefaction: she pretends, when Œdipus addresses her, to be ignorant of all that has been said, and endeavours to dissuade him from all farther enquiry; her advice naturally increases that curiosity which it was meant to remove, and leads the unfortunate Œdipus to a discovery of the whole.

Think not so deeply of this thing.

ŒDIPUS.

Good heav'n
Forbid, Jocasta, I shou'd now neglect
To clear my birth, when thus the path is mark'd
And open to me!

JOCASTA.

Do not, by the gods
I beg thee, do not, if thy life be dear,
Make farther search, for I have felt enough
Already from it.

ŒDIPUS.

Rest thou satisfied;
Were I descended from a race of slaves,
'Twou'd not dishonour thee.

JOCASTA.

Yet hear me; do not,
Once more I beg thee, do not search this matter.

ŒDIPUS.

I will not be persuaded: I must search
And find it too.

JOCASTA.

I know it best, and best
Advise thee.

ŒDIPUS.

That advice perplexes more.

JOCASTA.

O! wou'd to heav'n that thou may'st never know
Or who, or whence thou art!

ŒDIPUS (*to the* ATTENDANTS.)

Let some one fetch
That shepherd quick, and leave this woman here
To glory in her high descent.

A race of slaves. The original is, ' κ'δεν εκ τριτης εγω μητρος φανω τριδουλος,' ' not if I was thrice a slave from a third mother,' i. e. not if my mother, with her mother, and grandmother, for three generations back, had been slaves. This could not be admitted in the translation.

JOCASTA.

Alas!
Unhappy Œdipus! that word alone
I now can speak, remember 'tis my last.

[*Exit* JOCASTA.

SCENE IV.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Why fled the queen in such disorder hence?
Sorely distress'd she seem'd, and much I fear
Her silence bodes some sad event.

ŒDIPUS.

Whate'er
May come of that, I am resolv'd to know
The secret of my birth, how mean soever
It chance to prove; perhaps her sex's pride
May make her blush to find I was not born
Of noble parents; but I call myself
The son of fortune, my indulgent mother,

Remember 'tis my last. The silence and departure of Jocasta, on this occasion, are extremely judicious, and infinitely preferable to the rhetorical parade of lamentation put into her mouth by Seneca, Corneille and Dryden; nothing more could, indeed, be said by her with any degree of propriety: she was already convinced of her own and Œdipus's guilt, and in consequence of it had resolved to destroy herself; 'remember 'tis 'my last word;' this, we see, is purposely expressed in an ambiguous manner, and Œdipus does not perceive that she means never to speak to him again. Dacier remarks, that the conduct of Sophocles is truly admirable in this particular; for though it was absolutely necessary that Jocasta should be present at the unravelling of the plot, and discovery of Œdipus's birth, it was no longer so when the discovery was made, as their meeting afterwards would have been shocking and indecent: the truth of this observation may be justified by turning to Seneca, where the reader will see how that pompous writer has failed by leaving his master, and trusting to his own weaker genius.

The son of fortune. The ancients called all those the sons of fortune, who not knowing their parents, or being of mean extraction, had raised

Whom I shall never be ashamed to own.
The kindred months that are like me, her children,
The years that roll obedient to her will,
Have rais'd me from the lowest state to pow'r
And splendor: wherefore, being what I am,
I need not fear the knowledge of my birth.

SCENE V.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

If my prophetic soul doth well divine,
Ere on thy brow to-morrow's sun shall shine,
Cithæron, thou the myst'ry shalt unfold;
The doubtful Œdipus, no longer blind,
Shall soon his country and his father find,
And all the story of his birth be told;

themselves by merit to rank and dignity in the state. Horace speaking of himself, says

'Luserat in campo fortunæ filius.' Book II. Sat. 6.

The expression is luckily agreeable to our own idiom, and frequently made use of amongst us to convey exactly the same idea. What follows, when Œdipus considers himself as the offspring of Time, and calls the months his brethren, is perhaps the verbum ardens of Tully, or what the French term, idée trop hardie; the situation, however, and circumstances of Œdipus at this time, may render it more excusable.

If my prophetic soul, &c. Œdipus retreating with the Shepherd of Corinth, in expectation of the old man, to supply the intermediate space of time, the Chorus advances towards the middle of the theatre, probably near the altar of Apollo. As they are inclined throughout to judge favourably of their sovereign, they seem to wish, and almost to believe, that he may be found to be the son of some divinity. Dacier and Doctor Burton observe, that 'the Strophe and Antistrophe coming thus in 'the middle of the act, is something singular and uncommon, but that 'the Chorus in this place do not sing but speak.' With all due deference to these learned gentlemen, I cannot, for my own part, see any reason why the Strophe and Antistrophe should not be sung in this place as well as in any other; this is doubtless the fourth song or intermede of the Chorus, but the arbitrary division into acts, for which, as I before observed, there is no foundation, had puzzled the commentators, and forced them to this expedient as the best method of solving the difficulty.

Then shall we in grateful lays
Celebrate our monarch's praise,
And in the sprightly dance our songs triumphant raise.

ANTISTROPHE.

What heav'nly pow'r gave birth to thee, O king!
From Pan, the god of mountains, did'st thou spring
With some fair daughter of Apollo join'd;
Art thou from him who o'er Cyllene reigns,
Swift Hermes, sporting in Arcadia's plains?
Some Nymph of Helicon did Bacchus find,
Bacchus, who delights to rove
Through the forest, hill and grove,
And art thou, prince, the offspring of their love?

SCENE VI.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS, SHEPHERD FROM CORINTH.

If I may judge of one whom yet I ne'er
Had converse with, yon old man, whom I see
This way advancing, must be that same shepherd
We lately sent for, by his age and mein,
E'en as this stranger did describe him to us;
My servant's too are with him; but you best
Can say, for you must know him well.

CHORUS.

'Tis he,
My lord, the faithful shepherd of king Laius.

ŒDIPUS *(to the* SHEPHERD FROM CORINTH.)

What say'st thou, stranger, is it he?

SHEPHERD.

It is,

If I may judge, &c. Œdipus returns with the shepherd of Corinth; as he comes on the stage, seeing the Old Shepherd with the attendants at a distance, and advancing towards him, he addresses the Chorus.

SCENE VII.

OLD SHEPHERD, ŒDIPUS, SHEPHERD FROM CORINTH, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

Now answer me, old man, look this way, speak,
Did'st thou belong to Laius?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Sir, I did,
No hireling slave, but in his palace bred,
I serv'd him long.

ŒDIPUS.

What was thy bus'ness there?

OLD SHEPHERD.

For my life's better part I tended sheep.

ŒDIPUS.

And whither did'st thou lead them?

OLD SHEPHERD:

To Cithæron,
And to the neighb'ring plains.

ŒDIPUS.

Behold this man,
[*pointing to the* SHEPHERD OF CORINTH.
Dost thou remember to have seen him?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Whom?
What hath he done?

ŒDIPUS.

Him, who now stands before thee,
Call'st thou to mind, or converse or connection
Between you in times past?

OLD SHEPHERD.

I cannot say
I recollect it now.

SHEPHERD, OF CORINTH.

I do not wonder
He shou'd forget me, but I will recall
Some facts of antient date; he must remember
When on Cithæron we together fed
Our sev'ral flocks, in daily converse join'd
From spring to autumn, and when winter bleak
Approach'd, retir'd; I to my little cot
Convey'd my sheep, he to the palace led
His fleecy care; canst thou remember this?

OLD SHEPHERD.

I do, but that is long long since.

SHEPHERD, OF CORINTH.

It is;
But say, good shepherd, canst thou call to mind
An infant, whom thou did'st deliver to me,
Requesting me to breed him as my own?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Ha! wherefore ask'st thou this!

SHEPHERD, OF CORINTH *(pointing to* ŒDIPUS.*)*

Behold him here,
That very child.

OLD SHEPHERD.

O! say it not, away,
Perdition on thee!

ŒDIPUS.

Why reprove him thus?
Thou art thyself to blame, old man.

OLD SHEPHERD.

In what
Am I to blame, my lord?

ŒDIPUS.

Thou will't not speak
Touching this boy.

OLD SHEPHERD.

Alas! poor man, he knows not
What he hath said.

ŒDIPUS.

If not by softer means
To be persuaded, force shall wring it from thee.

OLD SHEPHERD.

Treat not an old man harshly.

ŒDIPUS *(to the* ATTENDANTS.*)*

Bind his hands.

OLD SHEPHERD.

Wherefore, my lord? what would'st thou have me do?

ŒDIPUS.

That child he talks of, didst thou give it to him?

OLD SHEPHERD.

I did, and wou'd to heav'n I then had died!

ŒDIPUS.

Die soon thou shalt, unless thou tell'st it all.

OLD SHEPHERD.

Say rather if I do.

ŒDIPUS.

This fellow means
To trifle with us, by his dull delay.

OLD SHEPHERD.

I do not; said I not I gave the child?

ŒDIPUS.

Whence came the boy? was he thy own, or who
Did give him to thee?

OLD SHEPHERD.

From another hand
I had receiv'd him.

ŒDIPUS.

Say, what hand? from whom?
Whence came he?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Do not, by the gods I beg thee,
Do not inquire.

ŒDIPUS.

Force me to ask again,
And thou shalt die.

OLD SHEPHERD.

In Laius' palace born ——

ŒDIPUS.

Son of a slave, or of the king?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Alas!

'Tis death for me to speak.

ŒDIPUS.

And me to hear;

Yet say it.

OLD SHEPHERD.

He was call'd the son of Laius;

But ask the queen, for she can best inform thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Did she then give the child to thee?

OLD SHEPHERD.

She did.

ŒDIPUS.

For what?

OLD SHEPHERD.

To kill him.

ŒDIPUS.

Kill her child! inhuman

And barb'rous mother!

OLD SHEPHERD.

A dire oracle

Affrighted, and constrain'd her to it.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha!

What oracle?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Which said, her son shou'd *slay*

His parents.

ŒDIPUS.

Wherefore gav'st thou then the infant

To this old shepherd?

OLD SHEPHERD.

Pity mov'd me to it:
I hop'd he wou'd have soon convey'd his charge
To some fair distant country; he, alas!
Preserv'd him but for misery and woe;
For, O! my lord, if thou indeed art he,
Thou art of all mankind the most unhappy.

ŒDIPUS.

O! me! at length the mystery's unravel'd,
'Tis plain; 'tis clear; my fate is all determin'd:
Those are my parents who shou'd not have been
Allied to me: she is my wife, e'en she
Whom nature had forbidden me to wed;
I have slain him who gave me life, and now
Of thee, O! light! I take my last farewell;
For Œdipus shall ne'er behold thee more. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE VIII.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O! hapless state of human race!
How quick the fleeting shadows pass
Of transitory bliss below,
Where all is vanity and woe!
By thy example taught, O! prince, we see
Man was not made for true felicity.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou, Œdipus, beyond the rest
Of mortals wert supremely blest;

O! hapless state, &c. This is the fifth and last song or intermede of the Chorus, who, convinced of Œdipus's guilt, lament the fate of their unhappy master in the most affecting manner; drawing at the same time, from his example, some moral reflections on the instability of all human happiness, naturally resulting from the subject, and suitable to the occasion. In justice to Sophocles, it may here be observed, that the songs of the Chorus throughout this play are not only in every point unexceptionable, but to the last degree beautiful and pathetic.

Whom ev'ry hand conspir'd to raise,
Whom ev'ry hand rejoic'd to praise,
When from the Sphynx thy all-preserving hand
Stretch'd forth its aid to save a sinking land.

STROPHE II.

Thy virtues rais'd thee to a throne,
And grateful Thebes was all thy own;
Alas! how chang'd that glorious name!
Lost are thy virtues and thy fame;
How could'st thou thus pollute thy father's bed?
How could'st thou thus thy hapless mother wed?

ANTISTROPHE II.

How cou'd that bed unconscious bear
So long the vile incestuous pair!
But time, of quick and piercing sight,
Hath brought the horrid deed to light;
At length Jocasta owns her guilty flame,
And finds a husband and a child the same.

EPODE.

Wretched son of Laius, thee
Henceforth may I never see,
But absent shed the pious tear,
And weep thy fate with grief sincere!
For thou didst raise our eyes to life and light,
To close them now in everlasting night.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

SAGES of Thebes, most honour'd and rever'd,
If e'er the house of Labdacus was dear
And precious to you, what will be your grief
When I shall tell the most disastrous tale

You ever heard, and to your eyes present
A spectacle more dreadful than they yet
Did e'er behold! not the wide Danube's waves
Nor Phasis' streams can wash away the stains
Of this polluted palace; the dire crimes
Long time conceal'd at length are brought to light;
But those, which spring from voluntary guilt,
Are still more dreadful.

CHORUS.

Nothing can be worse
Than what we know already; bring'st thou more
Misfortunes to us?

MESSENGER.

To be brief, the queen,
Divine Jocasta's dead.

CHORUS.

Jocasta dead! say, by what hand?

MESSENGER.

Her own;
And what's more dreadful, no one saw the deed.
What I myself beheld you all shall hear.
Enflam'd with rage, soon as she reach'd the palace,

Not the wide Danube's waves, &c. Isther, or the Danube, is one of the most considerable rivers in Europe, which passing by Illyricum runs into the Euxine sea. Phasis was a famous river in Colchis.

The antients imagined that water, and particularly that of fresh or living springs, could cleanse the mind as well as body from pollution; a piece of superstition which seems to have been adopted by the followers of Mahomet, whose frequent washings constitute no inconsiderable part of their religious duty. This calls to mind a similar passage in our English Sophocles, where lady Macbeth, after the murder of Duncan, comes out rubbing her hands, 'out, damn'd spot, out I say; will these hands 'never be white?—all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this 'little hand.' SHAKESPEAR'S MACBETH.

Voluntary guilt. Alluding to the actions of Œdipus; the murder and incest committed by him were involuntary crimes; but his anger, impatience, contempt of the gods, and putting out his own eyes, were voluntary; and therefore, as Sophocles observes, more dreadful: doubtless no misfortunes are so bitter and insupportable as those which we bring on ourselves by our own follies.

Instant retiring to the nuptial bed,
She shut the door, then rav'd and tore her hair,
Call'd out on Laius dead, and bade him think
On that unhappy son who murder'd him,
And stain'd his bed; then turning her sad eyes
Upon the guilty couch, she curs'd the place
Where she had borne a husband from her husband,
And children from her child; what follow'd then
I know not, by the cries of Œdipus
Prevented, for on him our eyes were fix'd
Attentive; forth he came, beseeching us
To lend him some sharp weapon, and inform him
Where he might find his mother and his wife,
His children's wretched mother, and his own:
Some ill-designing pow'r did then direct him
(For we were silent) to the queen's apartment,
Forcing the bolt, he rush'd into the bed,
And found Jocasta, where we all beheld her,
Entangled in the fatal noose, which soon
As he perceiv'd, loosing the pendent rope,
Deeply he groan'd, and casting on the ground
His wretched body, shew'd a piteous sight
To the beholders; on a sudden thence
Starting, he pluck'd from off the robe she wore

Some sharp weapon. Œdipus, in despair, desires them to lend him a sword, or any weapon to destroy himself. Dacier observes on this passage, that it is plain, from hence, that the antients wore no swords except in war, and laughs at Seneca for giving one to Œdipus.

Some ill-designing power. Τις δαιμων,' some dæmon.' Brumoy translates it, ' quelque noiré divinité.' The antients generally attributed evils and misfortunes to some unknown malevolent power.

Loosing the pendent rope. Hanging, though a death much in fashion amongst the antients, being at present so much out of vogue, and entirely banished from our stage, since the introduction of sword and poison; it is perhaps difficult for a translator to render this passage closely, without offence to the delicacy of modern ears. My readers must, however, excuse the common and vulgar expressions, as I could not alter the manner of Jocasta's death, without an unpardonable deviation from the original.

A golden buckle that adorn'd her side,
And buried in his eyes the sharpen'd point,
Crying, he ne'er again wou'd look on her,
Never wou'd see his crimes or mis'ries more,
Or those whom guiltless he cou'd ne'er behold,
Or those to whom he now must sue for aid;
His lifted eye-lids then, repeating still
These dreadful plaints, he tore; whilst down his cheek
Fell show'rs of blood: such fate the wretched pair
Sustain'd, partakers in calamity,
Fall'n from a state of happiness (for none
Were happier once than they) to groans, and death,
Reproach and shame, and ev'ry human woe.

CHORUS.

And where is now the poor unhappy man?

MESSENGER.

Open the doors, he cries, and let all Thebes
Behold his parents murd'rer, adding words
Not to be utter'd; banish'd now, he says,
He must be, nor, devoted as he is
By his own curse, remain in this sad place:
He wants a kind conductor and a friend
To help him now, for 'tis too much to bear.
But you will see him soon, for lo! the doors
Are open'd, and you will behold a sight
That wou'd to pity move his deadliest foe.

SCENE II.

ŒDIPUS, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

O! horrid sight! more dreadful spectacle
Than e'er these eyes beheld! what madness urg'd thee

Or those whom guiltless, &c. Meaning his children, whom he could not look on without the terrible recollection of his own guilt.

Or those to whom, &c. Meaning either his children, or Creon, to whom he applies in the last scene.

O! horrid sight! Here, we must suppose, the back scene opens, and

To this sad deed? what pow'r malignant heap'd
On thy poor head such complicated woe?
Unhappy man! alas! I wou'd have held
Some converse with thee, but thy looks affright me;
I cannot bear to speak to thee.

ŒDIPUS.

O! me!
Where am I? and whence comes the voice I hear?
Where art thou, fortune?

CHORUS.

Chang'd to misery,
Dreadful to hear, and dreadful to behold.

ŒDIPUS.

O! cruel darkness! endless, hopeless night,
Shame, terrors, and unutterable woe!
More painful is the mem'ry of my crimes
Than all the wounds my wild distraction made.

CHORUS.

Thus doubly curs'd, O! prince, I wonder not
At thy affliction.

ŒDIPUS.

Art thou here, my friend?
I know thy voice; thou would'st not leave the wretched;
Thou art my faithful, kind assistant still.

CHORUS.

How could'st thou thus deprive thyself of sight!
What madness drove thee to the desp'rate deed?

discovers Œdipus blind, and in the most miserable condition, advancing slowly towards the front of the stage; the Chorus shocked at so moving a spectacle, turn their eyes from him: the appearance of Œdipus in this place, was indeed extremely difficult for a writer of less abilities than Sophocles to make him speak with propriety, and say neither more nor less than he ought. Let the reader compare this simple and pathetic scene with the bombast of the turgid Seneca, who is, to the last degree tedious, in his aukward imitation of it.

Complicated woe. Dacier calls it, 'a deluge of misfortunes.' In the original it is, 'evils greater than the greatest evils,' which, how beautiful soever it may be in Greek, would not admit of a literal translation.

What god inspir'd?

ŒDIPUS.

Apollo was the cause;
He was, my friends, the cause of all my woes;
But for these eyes, myself did quench their light?
I want not them; what use were they to me,
But to discover scenes of endless woe.

CHORUS.

'Tis but too true.

ŒDIPUS.

What pleasure now remains
For Œdipus? he cannot joy in aught
To sight or ear delightful. Curse on him,
Whoe'er he was, that loosen'd my bound feet,
And sav'd me, in Cithæron's vale, from death!
I owe him nothing: had I perish'd then,
Much happier had it been for you, my friends,
And for myself.

CHORUS.

I too cou'd wish thou had'st.

ŒDIPUS.

I shou'd not then have murder'd Laius; then
I had not ta'en Jocasta to my bed;
But now I am a guilty wretch, the son
Of a polluted mother, father now
To my own brothers, all that's horrible
To nature is the lot of Œdipus.

CHORUS.

Yet must I blame this cruel act, for sure
The loss of sight is worse than death itself.

ŒDIPUS.

I care not for thy counsel, or thy praise;
For with what eyes cou'd I have e'er beheld

Apollo was the cause. By delivering the oracle, which foretold that Œdipus should kill his father, and afterwards pronouncing the dreadful sentence against the murderer.

My honour'd father in the shades below,
Or my unhappy mother, both destroy'd
By me? this punishment is worse than death,
And so it shou'd be: sweet had been the sight
Of my dear children, them I cou'd have wish'd
To gaze upon; but I must never see
Or them, or this fair city, or the palace
Where I was born; depriv'd of ev'ry bliss
By my own lips, which doom'd to banishment
The murderer of Laius, and expell'd
The impious wretch, by gods and men accurs'd:
Cou'd I behold them after this? O! no!
Wou'd I cou'd now with equal ease remove
My hearing too, be deaf as well as blind,
And from another entrance shut out woe!
To want our senses, in the hour of ill,
Is comfort to the wretched. O! Cithæron,
Why didst thou e'er receive me, or receiv'd,
Why not destroy, that men might never know
Who gave me birth? O! Polybus, O! Corinth,
And thou, long time believ'd my father's palace,
O! what a foul disgrace to human nature
Didst thou receive beneath a prince's form!
Impious myself, and from an impious race.
Where is my splendor now? O! Daulian path,
The shady forest, and the narrow pass
Where three ways meet, who drank a father's blood,
Shed by these hands: do you not still remember
The horrid deed, and what, when here I came,

In the shades below. It appears from this passage that the Greeks imagined the body after death would remain exactly in the same state as before. Œdipus believed that his blindness would continue when he was removed to the shades below. The same opinion, we know, prevailed with regard to the mind also.

My father's palace. That is, the palace of Polybus, king of Corinth, the supposed father of Œdipus, who brought him up as his own, and educated him accordingly.

Follow'd more dreadful? fatal nuptials, you
Produc'd me, you return'd me to the womb
That bare me; thence relations horrible
Of fathers, sons, and brothers came; of wives,
Sisters, and mothers, sad alliance! all
That man holds impious and detestable.
But what in act is vile, the modest tongue
Shou'd never name: bury me, hide me, friends,
From ev'ry eye; destroy me, cast me forth
To the wide ocean, let me perish there:
Do any thing to shake off hated life;
Seize me, approach, my friends, you need not fear,
Polluted tho' I am, to touch me; none
Shall suffer for my crimes, but I alone.

CHORUS.

In most fit time, my lord, the noble Creon
This way advances; he can best determine
And best advise; sole guardian now of Thebes,
To him thy pow'r devolves.

ŒDIPUS.

What shall I say;

Fatal nuptials, &c. 'Plurals, (says Longinus in the 19th chapter of 'his Treatise on the Sublime) impart a greater magnificence to the style, 'and by the copiousness of number, give it more emphasis and grace; 'so the words of Œdipus in Sophocles.' [Here follows the passage] 'All these terms (continues the great critic) denote on the one side Œdi- 'pus only, and on the other Jocasta: but the number, thrown into the 'plural, seems to multiply the misfortunes of that unfortunate pair, and 'excite greater and more elevated ideas.' See Smyth's excellent Translation of Longinus, p. 61.

But what in act, &c. Œdipus is going on, but stops short, as if shocked at the bare repetition of his crime, which produces this moral reflection; the sentiment is adopted by Publius Syrus,

'Quod facere turpe est; dicere ne honestum puta.'

You need not fear. Alluding to a superstitious notion amongst the antients, that it was dangerous even to touch an accursed person, or one seemingly visited with misfortunes by the gods. In the Œdipus Coloneus, we find this religious fear still more strongly impressed on the minds of all that come near that unfortunate exile.

Can I apply to him for aid, whom late
I deeply injur'd by unjust suspicion?

SCENE III.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CREON.

I come not, prince, to triumph o'er thy woes
With vile reproach; I pity thy misfortunes;
But, O! my Thebans, if you do not fear
The censure of your fellow-citizens,
At least respect the all-creating eye
Of Phœbus, who beholds you thus exposing
To public view a wretch accurs'd, polluted,
Whom neither earth can bear, nor sun behold,
Nor holy show'r besprinkle: take him hence,
Within the palace; those, who are by blood
United, shou'd alone be witnesses
Of such calamity.

ŒDIPUS.

O! Creon, thou,
The best of men, and I the worst; how kind
Thou art to visit me! O! by the gods
Let me entreat thee, since beyond my hopes
Thou art so good, now hear me; what I ask
Concerns thee most.

CREON.

What is it thou desir'st

Holy shower. This refers to the curse pronounced by Œdipus himself on the murderer of Laius, in the first scene of the second act. It was customary (as is observed in a note on the passage) for the priests to sprinkle water on those who assisted at the sacrifice, and sometimes, probably, in such abundance as might properly be called 'a shower;' this custom of purification we find practised in other places as well as Greece, and alluded to in Scripture: 'then will I sprinkle clean water 'upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness,' Ezek. xxxvi. v. 25. 'Let us draw near (says the author of the Epistle to the He- 'brews) having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our 'bodies washed with pure water.' Heb. x. v. 22.

Thus ardently?

ŒDIPUS.

I beg thee, banish me
From Thebes this moment, to some land remote,
Where I may ne'er converse with man again.

CREON.

Myself long since had done it, but the gods
Must be consulted first.

ŒDIPUS.

Their will is known
Already, and their oracle declar'd
The guilty parricide shou'd die.

CREON.

It hath;
But, as it is, 'twere better to enquire
What must be done.

ŒDIPUS.

For such a wretch as me
Would'st thou again explore the will of heav'n?

CREON.

Thy hapless fate shou'd teach us to believe,
And reverence the gods.

ŒDIPUS.

Now, Creon, list;
I beg thee, I conjure thee, let a tomb
Be rais'd, and all due honours paid to her
Who lies within: she was thy sister, Creon;
It is a duty which thou ow'st: for me,
I cannot hope this city now will deign

The gods must be consulted. As Creon was next heir to the crown of Thebes, if he had, on the conviction of Œdipus's guilt, immediately put in execution the sentence against him without farther consultation of the oracle, it might have been attributed to his impatient desire of succeeding to the kingdom: this would in some measure have stained the purity of his character, which Sophocles has represented as blameless and unspotted throughout this whole drama, though he has taken the liberty to change it in another.

To keep me here; O! Creon, let me go,
And seek the solitary mountain's top,
My own Cithæron, by my parents doom'd
Long since to be the grave of Œdipus;
There wou'd I die, as they decreed I shou'd;
Alas! I cannot, must not perish yet,
Till I have suffer'd evils worse than death,
For I was only sav'd to be unhappy:
But I must meet my fate, whate'er it be.
My sons are men, and wheresoever fortune
May place them, cannot want the means of life;
They shall not burthen thee; but, O! my friend,
What will become of my unhappy daughters,
With tend'rest love, beneath a father's hand,
Cherish'd so long? O take them to thy care,
Thou best of men! O! might I but embrace them
But shed a tear o'er their disastrous fate,
Might I be suffer'd but to touch them here,
I shou'd rejoice, and think I saw them still.
But hark! methinks e'en now I hear the voice
Of my dear daughters; hath the gracious Creon,
In pity to my woes, already brought
My children to me; is it so?

CREON.

It is:
Thy wishes are prevented; they are here.

SCENE IV.

DAUGHTERS OF ŒDIPUS, ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

May heav'n reward thee for this goodness to me,
And give thee much more bliss than I have known!
Now, my dear children, come towards me, come

Now my dear children, &c. The passions of terror and pity were never more effectually or more judiciously raised than in this tragedy: that

Towards your father and your —— brother; see
These sightless eyes, pierc'd by my own mad hands;
Behold that wretched father who begat you
Unknowingly on her who gave me birth;
I cannot see you now, I can but weep
Your fate, to think what hours of wretchedness
You have to know hereafter: whither now
Must my poor children fly? from ev'ry feast
Joyless with grief and shame shall you return;
And when the time shall come, when riper years
Shou'd give you to the nuptial bed, who then,
Careless of fame, will let his child partake
The infamy of my abhorred race,
Sprang from a wretch accurs'd, who kill'd his father,
And from the womb that bare him did beget
You my unhappy daughters? such reproach
Must still be yours, to virgin solitude
Devoted ever, and a barren bed.
Son of Menæceus, thou alone art left
Their father now, for O! Jocasta's dead,
And I am —— nothing; do not then forsake
Thy kindred; nor, deserted and forlorn,
Suffer them still, in penury and woe,
To wander helpless, in their tender age:
Remember they have no support but thee.
O! gen'rous prince, have pity on them, give me
Thy friendly hand in promise of thy aid.
To you, my daughters, had your early years
Permitted, I had giv'n my last advice:
Too young for counsel, all I ask of you
Is but to pray the gods that my sad life
May not be long, but yours, my children, crown'd

horror which the spectators must feel at the crimes of Œdipus, is finely contrasted by this pathetic address to his daughters, which excites the warmest compassion for his misfortunes, and creates in the mind of the audience that piety and submission to the will of the gods, which the whole drama is visibly designed to inculcate.

With many days, and happier far than mine.

CREON.

It is enough; go in, thy grief transports thee
Beyond all bounds.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis hard, but I submit.

CREON.

The time demands it, therefore go.

ŒDIPUS.

O! Creon,
Know'st thou what now I wish?

CREON.

What is it? speak,

ŒDIPUS.

That I may quit this fatal place.

CREON.

Thou ask'st
What heav'n alone can grant.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas! to heav'n
I am most hateful.

CREON.

Yet shalt thou obtain
What thou desir'st.

ŒDIPUS.

Shall I indeed?

CREON.

Thou shalt;
I never say aught that I do not mean.

ŒDIPUS.

Then let me go; may I depart?

CREON.

Thou may'st;
But leave thy children.

Leave thy children, &c. Dacier judiciously observes on this passage, that every thing dreadful was to be feared from the violent temper and

ŒDIPUS.

Do not take them from me.

CREON.

Thou must not always have thy will; already
Thou'st suffer'd for it.

CHORUS.

Thebans, now behold
The great, the mighty Œdipus, who once
The Sphynx's dark ænigma cou'd unfold;
Who less to fortune than to wisdom ow'd;
In virtue as in rank to all superior,
Yet fall'n at last to deepest misery.
Let mortals hence be taught to look beyond

unfortunate condition of Œdipus. Creon was probably apprehensive, that in the height of despair he might destroy his children; he prudently, therefore, keeps them from him. To which remark it may be added, that Œdipus had just before delivered his daughters to the care of Creon, who had consequently a right to dispose of them as he thought proper. Mr. Boivin finds fault with the behaviour of Creon on this occasion; he makes no scruple of condemning the two last scenes as spurious, calls the speech of Œdipus to his daughters, 'lamentation indigne d'un grand 'personage,' and accuses him of 'une bizarre changement d'humeur & 'de caractere.' He makes, at the same time, several other severe, but ill-founded reflections, on the conduct of the drama, which seem to have arisen partly from his ignorance of Grecian manners, and partly from misunderstanding the sense of the original; mistakes, which it were easy to point out; but I refer my reader to the criticism itself, which they will find in the 9th volume of the Histoire de l'Academie des Inscriptions, &c. 4to, p. 372.

Let mortals hence, &c. This sentiment is originally attributed to the wise law-giver Solon, and said to have been spoken by him to Crœsus. Ovid has turned it thus,

——— ultima semper
Expectanda dies homini, dicique beatus
Ante obitum nemo, supremaque funera debet.

Mr. Boivin positively asserts, that these lines do not belong to Sophocles, but were foisted in by some transcriber: he calls them, 'une mo-'ralité fade, usée, & triviale, un lieu commun, qui convient indifférem-'ment à la pluspart des sujets tragiques,' 'a piece of insipid, trite, and 'trivial morality, a common place, suited equally to almost any tragedy.' In spite of this severe censure, I cannot but be of opinion, that the moral is here introduced with the utmost propriety, and though it may

The present time, nor dare to say, a man
Is happy, till the last decisive hour
Shall close his life without the taste of woe.

indeed be applied to other subjects, seems peculiarly adapted to this, as it could never be better exemplified and illustrated, than by the story of Œdipus in the preceding drama; a performance which reflects the highest honour on its author; being perhaps, considered in every light, his most finished work, and the chef-d'œuvre of antiquity.

ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS.

CREON.

ANTIGONE, } DAUGHTERS OF ŒDIPUS.
ISMENE, }

POLYNICES, SON OF ŒDIPUS.

THESEUS, KING OF ATHENS.

AN ATHENIAN.

MESSENGER.

ATTENDANTS, ON CREON, THESEUS, AND ISMENE.

CHORUS, COMPOSED OF ANTIENT MEN OF THEBES.

SCENE—A GROVE, AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF THE FURIES.

ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDIPUS.

WHERE are we now, my dear Antigone?
Know'st thou the place? Will any here afford
Their scanty alms to a poor wanderer,
The banish'd Œdipus? I ask not much,

Where are we now, &c. This tragedy is a continuation of the history of Œdipus, who, condemned to perpetual banishment, is supposed to have wandered from city to city, and to arrive at last, conducted by his daughter Antigone, at Colonus, a little hill, not far from Athens, where was a temple and grove sacred to the Furies, or, as they are styled, the venerable goddesses. The subject is extremely simple, containing little more than a narration of the principal and most remarkable circumstances attending the death of Œdipus. To taste the beauties of this piece, it is absolutely necessary that the reader have an eye throughout both to the political and religious state of Greece, and the time of its appearance on the stage. Valerius Maximus informs us that Sophocles wrote it when he was near a hundred years of age, and prefers it, for what reason I know not, to all his tragedies. Cicero also, who was a much more competent judge, seems to have been highly pleased with it, and has left us the following remarkable anecdote concerning it, viz. That Sophocles wrote tragedies even in extreme old age; bestowing so much attention on them as totally to neglect every thing else; insomuch that his sons summoned him before the judges as an ideot and dotard, utterly incapable of acting for himself, and requesting that the administration of his affairs might be taken from him, and put into their hands: the old man appeared in court to defend himself against the accusation, and producing the tragedy of Œdipus Coloneus, which he had just then

Yet less receive; but I am satisfied:
Long time hath made my woes familiar to me,
And I have learn'd to bear calamity.
But tell me, daughter, if thou see'st a place
Or sacred, or profane, where I may rest,
There set me down, from some inhabitant
A chance but we may learn where now we are,
And act, so strangers ought, as he directs us.

ANTIGONE.

O! Œdipus, my poor unhappy father,
Far as my eyes can reach, I see a city,
With lofty turrets crown'd, and, if I err not,
This place is sacred, by the laurel shade
Olive and vine thick-planted, and the songs
Of nightingales sweet warbling thro' the grove;
Here set thee down, and rest thy wearied limbs
On this rude stone; 'tis a long way for age
Like thine to travel.

ŒDIPUS.

Place me here, and guard
A sightless wretch.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! at such a time
Thou need'st not tell Antigone her duty.

ŒDIPUS.

Know'st thou not where we are?

ANTIGONE.

As I have learn'd
From passing travellers, not far from Athens;
The place I know not; wou'd you that I go
And straight enquire? but now I need not leave thee,

finished, asked the judges if that appeared to be the work of an ideot. The piece was read, and applauded, the sons petition rejected with derision, and Sophocles acquitted with honour. We know not what authority Tully had for this story; it may not however be amiss to observe, that the bitter accusations against his sons, which the poet hath put into the mouth of Œdipus, seem to confirm the truth of it.

For, lo! a stranger comes this way, e'en now
He stands before you, he will soon inform us.

SCENE II.

AN ATHENIAN, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDIPUS.

Stranger, thou com'st in happy hour to tell us
What much we wish to know; let me then ask thee —

ATHENIAN.

Ask nothing; speak not till thou art remov'd
From off that hallow'd spot, where now thou stand'st,
By human footsteps not to be profan'd.

ŒDIPUS.

To whom then is it sacred?

ATHENIAN.

'Tis a place
Where but to tread is impious, and to dwell
Forbidden; where the dreadful goddesses,
Daughters of Earth and Night, alone inhabit.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! let me hear their venerable names.

ATHENIAN.

By other names in other climes ador'd,

Speak not, &c. Amongst the antients not only the temples and altars of their deities, but also the groves, forests, and vineyards adjoining to them were esteemed sacred: insomuch that it was held impious and unlawful for any but the priests to enter into them: the Athenian stranger, therefore will not converse with Œdipus till he is removed from that forbidden spot, where he had placed himself, into the public path.

The dreadful goddesses. These dreadful, or venerable goddesses, were the three furies, Alecto, Megæra, and Tisiphone; daughters, as Sophocles tells us, of Earth and Night; or, according to other poetical genealogists, of Nox and Acheron, supposed to be the avengers of impiety; as such, altars and temples were erected to them. Those, who are inclined to allegorise the pagan mythology, easily transform them into the stings of conscience, which tormented Œdipus.

The natives here call them Eumenides,
Th' all-seeing pow'rs.

ŒDIPUS.

O! that they wou'd but smile
Propitious, and receive a suppliant's pray'r,
That I might never leave this blest abode!

ATHENIAN.

What dost thou mean?

ŒDIPUS.

It suits my sorrows well.

ATHENIAN.

I must inform the citizens; till then
Remain.

ŒDIPUS.

O! do not scorn a wretched exile,
But tell me, stranger——

ATHENIAN.

Speak; I scorn thee not.

ŒDIPUS.

What place is this?

ATHENIAN.

I'll tell thee what I know.
This place is sacred all: great Neptune here
Presides, and he who bears the living fire,
Titan Prometheus; where thou tread'st, is call'd
The brazen way, the bulwark of our state:

Great Neptune, &c. Neptune is reported by the poets to have struck the earth with his trident, which immediately produced a horse: in allusion to this, Colonus, where he was worshipped, is called the Equestrian hill.

Titan Prometheus. Prometheus, according to the tales of the heathens concerning him, was supposed to have stolen fire from heaven, and with it to have made men, or, according to the satirical Lucian, which was more criminal, women; for which impiety he was punished by the gods in the same manner as the rebellious Titans: he is therefore called in this place Titan Prometheus.

The brazen way. Near this brazen way was supposed to be the passage to Hades, or the shades, by which Pluto conveyed the ravished Proserpine to his dominions. Some imagined it was so called from the

From this equestrian hill, their safest guard,
The neighb'ring villagers their gen'ral name
Derive, thence call'd Colonians all.

ŒDIPUS.

But say,
Are there, who dwell here, then?

ATHENIAN.

There are, and call'd
From him they worship.

ŒDIPUS.

Is the pow'r supreme
Lodg'd in the people's voice, or in the king?

ATHENIAN.

'Tis in the king,

ŒDIPUS.

Who is he?

ATHENIAN.

Theseus, son
Of Ægeus, their last sov'reign.

ŒDIPUS.

Who will go,
And tell him ——

ATHENIAN.

What, to come and meet thee here?

ŒDIPUS.

To tell him that a little help bestow'd
Wou'd amply be repaid.

ATHENIAN.

Why, what could'st thou do,
Dark as thou art?

ŒDIPUS.

My words will not be so.

brazen mines abounding in that neighbourhood: it was most probably a kind of bridge, or narrow pass for travellers, and lay between the two parts of the sacred grove, from which the Athenian stranger calls to Œdipus.

ATHENIAN.

Then mark me, that thou err not; for to me
Thy fortunes seem ill-suited to thy nature,
Which is most noble; therefore stay thou here
Till I return, I will not go to Athens,
But ask these villagers, who sojourn here,
If thou may'st stay. [*Exit* ATHENIAN.

SCENE III.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDIPUS.

My daughter, is he gone?

ANTIGONE.

He is, and thou may'st safely speak, for I
Alone am with thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Goddesses rever'd!
Since in your seats my wearied steps have found
Their first repose, not inauspicious smile
On Phœbus and on me! for know, the god
Who 'gainst unhappy Œdipus denounc'd
Unnumber'd woes, foretold that here at last
I shou'd have rest, within this hallow'd grove
These hospitable shades, and finish here

Goddesses rever'd, &c. One would not imagine that this play, from the apparent simplicity and barrenness of the fable, which promises no more than an account of the death of a poor old man in an obscure corner of the earth, could possibly produce any incidents that would please or instruct; Sophocles has, notwithstanding, so contrived as to make the business of this play extremely interesting to an Athenian audience. Œdipus, as soon as he is informed where he is, addresses himself in the most solemn manner to the deities of the place, recollecting an oracle which since his banishment has declared to him, that this spot would put a period to all his woes. We shall perceive that the hero of the drama becomes every moment of more and more consequence, and that no less than the safety and prosperity of a whole kingdom depends on this seemingly accidental and insignificant circumstance.

A life of mis'ry: happy those, he said,
Who shou'd receive me, glorious their reward,
And woe to them who strove to drive me hence.
Inhuman; this he promis'd to confirm
By signs undoubted; thunder, or the sound
Of dreadful earthquake, or the light'ning's blast
Launch'd from the arm of Jove; I doubt it not,
From you some happy omen hither led
My prosp'rous steps, that first to you I came
Pure to the pure; and here on this rude seat
Repos'd me, cou'd not be the work of chance;
Wherefore, ye pow'rs! as Phœbus hath decreed,
Here let me find a period of my woes!
Here end my wretched life! unless the man,
Who long hath groan'd beneath the bitt'rest ills
That mortals feel, still seem to merit more.
Daughters of Antient Night! O! hear me now!
And thou, from great Minerva call'd, the best,
And noblest city, Athens! pity me;
Pity the shadow of poor Œdipus!
For, O! I am not what I was.

ANTIGONE.

No more;
Behold a venerable band approach
Of antient natives, come perchance to seek thee.

ŒDIPUS.

I've done; Antigone, remove me hence,
And hide me in the grove, till by their words,
List'ning I learn their purpose; such foreknowledge
Will best direct us how to act hereafter. [*Exeunt.*

Pure to pure. In the original it is, 'sober to the sober,' alluding to the sacrifices offered to the furies, in which wine was never used; because, says doctor Potter, the divine justice ought always to be chaste, sober, and vigilant.

SCENE IV.

CHORUS.

Where is he? look, examine, search around
For this abandon'd exile, of mankind
The most profane, doubtless some wretched stranger;
Who else had dar'd on this forbidden soil
To tread? where dwell the dreadful deities
We tremble e'en to name, and as we pass
Dare not behold, but silently revere,
Or soft with words of fairest omen greet.
Of these regardless, here we come to find
An impious wretch; I look around the grove,
But still he lurks unseen.

SCENE V.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ŒDIPUS.

Behold me here;
For by your words I find you look for me.

CHORUS *(looking steadfastly at him.)*

Dreadful his voice, and terrible his aspect!

ŒDIPUS.

I am no outlaw; do not look thus on me.

Where is he? This is the first appearance of the Chorus, who being acquainted by the Athenian traveller, that there was a man in the sacred grove, alarmed at such presumption and impiety, enter in search of Œdipus, who had retired with Antigone to the inner part of the wood. In this, and the following scene, the reader must enter into, and make allowance for the follies of pagan superstition.

Behold me here. Œdipus and Antigone, overhearing the words of the Chorus, and apprehensive of being soon discovered by them, leave their retreat, and re-enter the stage.

No out-law. The word out-law, though not very poetical, seems the best which our language can afford to express the precise meaning of 'ανομος;' one whom the laws of his country had expelled from all the benefits and privileges of society.

CHORUS.

Jove the defender! who is this old man?

ŒDIPUS.

One on whom fortune little hath bestow'd
To call for rev'rence from you; that, alas!
Is but too plain; thus by another's eyes
Conducted here, and on her aid depending,
Old as I am.

CHORUS.

Alas! and wert thou born
Thus sightless? full of sorrow and of years
Indeed thou seem'st; but do not let on us
Thy curse devolve; thou hast transgress'd the bounds
Prescrib'd to mortals; shun this hallow'd grove,
Where on the grassy surface, to the pow'rs
A welcome off'ring, flows with honey mix'd
The limpid stream; unhappy stranger, hence,
Away, begone: thou see'st 'tis a long space
Divides us: dost thou hear me, wretched exile?
This instant, if thou dost, depart, then speak,
But not before.

ŒDIPUS.

Antigone, my daughter,
What's to be done?

ANTIGONE.

Obey the citizens;
Give me thy hand.

ŒDIPUS.

I will; and now, my friends,
Confiding thus in you, and thus removing
As you directed, let me not be injur'd.

And now my friends, &c. Here we must suppose, that Œdipus, with the assistance of his daughter, moves a little way from the place where he first stood; but the Chorus, perceiving that he is still on part of the holy ground, will not converse with him till he is entirely removed to a stone at the extremity of it, which probably lay in the public road.

CHORUS.

Thou shalt not; be assur'd that thou art safe;
None shall offend or drive thee hence.

ŒDIPUS.

Yet more
Must I approach?

CHORUS.

A little farther still.

ŒDIPUS.

Will this suffice?

CHORUS.

Remove him this way, virgin;
Thou hear'st us.

ANTIGONE.

Thou must follow me, my father,
Weak as thou art; we are unhappy strangers,
And must submit; whate'er the city hates
Content to hate, and what she loves to love.

ŒDIPUS.

Lead me, my daughter, to some hallow'd spot
For mutual converse fit, nor let us strive
With dire necessity.

CHORUS.

Stop there, nor move
Beyond that stone.

ŒDIPUS.

Thus, then?

CHORUS.

It is enough.

ŒDIPUS.

Where shou'd I sit?

CHORUS.

A little forward lean,
And rest thee there.

ANTIGONE *(taking hold of him.)*

Alas!—'tis my sad office,

Let me perform it, to direct thy steps;
To this lov'd hand commit thy aged limbs;
I will be careful. [*She seats him on the Stone.*

ŒDIPUS.

O! unhappy state!

CHORUS.

Now, wretched stranger, tell us who thou art,
Thy country, and thy name.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas! my lords,
A poor abandon'd exile, but, O! do not——

CHORUS.

What say'st thou?

ŒDIPUS.

Do not ask me who I am;
Enquire no farther.

CHORUS.

Wherefore?

ŒDIPUS.

My sad race——

CHORUS.

Speak on.

ŒDIPUS (*turning to* ANTIGONE.)

My daughter, how shall I proceed?

CHORUS.

Thy race, thy father——

ŒDIPUS.

O! Antigone,
What do I suffer?

ANTIGONE.

Speak, thou canst not be
More wretched than thou art.

ŒDIPUS.

I will, for, O!
It cannot be conceal'd.

CHORUS.

You do delay;
Inform us straight.

ŒDIPUS.

Know you the son of Laius?

CHORUS.

Alas!

ŒDIPUS.

The race of Labdacus.

CHORUS.

O! Jove!

ŒDIPUS.

Th' unhappy Œdipus.

CHORUS.

And art thou he?

ŒDIPUS.

Be not affrighted at my words.

CHORUS.

O! heav'n!

ŒDIPUS.

Wretch that I am! what will become of me?

CHORUS.

Away, begone, fly from this place.

ŒDIPUS.

Then where
Are all your promises? are they forgotten?

CHORUS.

Justice divine will never punish those
Who but repay the inj'ry they receive;
And fraud doth merit fraud for its reward.
Wherefore, begone, and leave us, lest once more
Our city be compell'd to force thee hence.

Th' unhappy Œdipus. Œdipus stammers, hesitates, and is, with the utmost difficulty, brought to discover himself to the Chorus; who, agreeably to his apprehensions, are so shocked and terrified when they know who he is, that they are even about to retract their promise of favour and protection, which they had just made to him. They seem afraid that his guilt was contagious; and that a man so accursed, would bring down upon them the wrath of the gods; till mollified by his predictions of future advantages to their country, they relent.

ANTIGONE.

O! my kind friends, as you revere the name
Of virtue, tho' you will not hear the pray'rs
Of my unhappy father, worn with age,
And laden with involuntary crimes;
Yet hear the daughter pleading for her sire,
And pity her, who with no evil eye
Beholds you, but, as one of the same race,
Born of one common father, here entreats
Your mercy to th' unhappy, for on you,
As on some god alone, we must rely;
Then grant this wish'd-for boon, O! grant it now,
By all that's dear to thee, thy sacred word,
Thy interest, thy children, and thy god;
'Tis not in mortals to avoid the crime
Which heav'n hath pre-ordain'd.

CHORUS.

We pity thee,
Daughter of Œdipus; we pity him,
And his misfortunes; but of wrath divine
Still fearful, dare not alter our decree.

ŒDIPUS.

Now who shall trust to glory and fair fame?
What shall it profit, that your pious city
Was once for hospitable rites renown'd,
That she alone wou'd pity and relieve
Th' afflicted stranger? is she so to me
Who drives me hence, and trembles at a name?
Me you can never fear, and for my crimes
I am the suff'rer, not th' offender: what
Touching my father I have spoke, alas!
If 'tis for that you do abhor me thus,
Was I to blame? the injury receiv'd

Your pious city. In this, and many other passages of the Œdipus Coloneus, Sophocles takes occasion to compliment his countrymen the Athenians, and more particularly the inhabitants of Coloneus; which is supposed to have been the place of his nativity.

I but repaid, and therefore had I known
The crime I acted, I were guiltless still:
Whither I came, I came unknowingly;
Not so they acted who have banish'd me.
By your commands already here remov'd,
O! by the gods, preserve, assist me now;
If you revere them, do not thus despise
What they decree, their eyes behold the good
And view the evil man, nor shall the wicked
Escape their wrath: use not their sacred names
To cover crimes, and stain the fame of Athens:
As you receiv'd the suppliant, O! remember
Your plighted faith, preserve me, save me now;
Look not contemptuous on this wretched form,
Or cast reproach unmerited; I come
Nor impious, nor profane; and with me bring
To Athens much of profit and renown,
As when your king arrives, you all shall know;
Mean time despise me not.

CHORUS.

Old man, thy words
Are full of weight, and merit our observance;
If those who here preside but know thy purpose,
It doth suffice.

ŒDIPUS.

But say, where is the king?

CHORUS.

Within his palace; but a messenger
Is gone to fetch him hither.

ŒDIPUS.

O! my friends,
Think you a sightless wretch like me will move
His pity or his care, that he will come?

CHORUS.

Most readily, when he shall hear the name
Of Œdipus.

ŒDIPUS.

And who shall tell it him?

CHORUS.

The journey's long; but passing travellers
Will catch the tale, and he must hear it soon;
Fear not, thy story is already known
On ev'ry side, 'twill quicken his slow steps,
And bring him instant hither.

ŒDIPUS.

May he come
In happy hour to Athens and to me!
He will; what good man doth not love his country?

ANTIGONE.

O! Jove! what shall I say or think? my father——

ŒDIPUS.

What says my daughter?

ANTIGONE.

This way bent, behold
On a Sicilian steed, a woman comes,
Her face conceal'd by a Thessalian veil,
To shield her from the sun; am I deceiv'd,
Or, is it she? I know not what to think.
It is my sister, now she smiles upon me;
It must, it can be none but my Ismene.

ŒDIPUS.

Who, my Antigone?

ANTIGONE.

It is thy daughter,
My sister; but her voice will soon convince you.

SCENE VI.

ISMENE AND ATTENDANT, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ISMENE.

O! the sweet sounds! a father and a sister!
What pains have I not suffer'd in the search?
And now for grief can scarce behold you.

ŒDIPUS.

Oh!
My daughter, art thou here?

ISMENE.

Alas! my father,
How terribly thou look'st!

ŒDIPUS.

From the same blood
The father and the daughter.

ISMENE.

Wretched race!

ŒDIPUS.

And art thou come, my daughter?

ISMENE.

I have reach'd thee
With toil and labour.

ŒDIPUS.

Touch me, O! my child!

ISMENE.

Let me embrace you both.

ŒDIPUS.

Both miserable!

ISMENE.

Join then a third as wretched as yourselves.
[*they all embrace.*

ŒDIPUS.

Ismene, wherefore art thou come?

ISMENE.

My care
For thee, my father, brought me here.

ŒDIPUS.

For me?

ISMENE.

That I might speak to thee; this faithful slave
Alone conducted me. [*pointing to her* ATTENDANT.

ŒDIPUS.

Thy brothers, say,
What are they doing?

ISMENE.

They are — what they are;
For, O! between them deadliest discord reigns.

ŒDIPUS.

How like th' unmanly sons of Egypt's clime,
Where the men sit inglorious at the loom,
And to their wives leave each domestic care!
E'en thus my sons, who shou'd have labour'd for me,
Like women idly sit at home, whilst you
Perform their office, and with filial care
Attend a wretched father; this kind maid,
[*pointing to* ANTIGONE.
E'en from her infant days, hath wander'd long
An exile with me, and supported still
My feeble age; oft thro' the savage woods,
Naked and hungry, by the wint'ry storms
Or scorching heats afflicted, led me on,
And gave me food, unmindful of her own.
Thou too, Ismene, wert my faithful guard,
When I was driven forth; and now art come
To tell thy father what the gods declare;
A stranger now to Thebes, I know not what
Hath pass'd between them; thou hast some sad news,
I know thou hast, to tell thy wretched father.

ISMENE.

What I have suffer'd in the search of thee,
I pass in silence o'er, since to repeat,
Were but, alas! to double my misfortunes;
I only came to tell thee the sad fate
Of thy unhappy sons; awhile they seem'd
As if they meant to yield the throne to Creon,
Nor stain their guilty hands with Theban blood,
Mindful of that pollution which remain'd
On thy devoted race; but now some god
Or their own wicked minds have rais'd a flame
Of dire contention, which shall gain the pow'r
Supreme, and reign in Thebes: Eteocles

Hath drove his elder Polynices forth;
Who, now an exile, seeks (as fame reports)
The Argians, and in solemn contract join'd
With these his new allies wou'd raise their fame
Above the stars, and sink our Thebes in ruin.
These are not words alone, 'tis now in act,
Alas! e'en now I fear, nor know I when
The gods will take compassion on thy woes.

ŒDIPUS.

Hast thou no hope they'll pity me?

ISMENE.

I have;
Their oracles have said it.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! said what,
My daughter, tell me, what have they declar'd?

ISMENE.

The time wou'd come, they said, when Thebes once more
Must seek thee, dead or living, for her safety.

ŒDIPUS.

Why, what cou'd such a wretch as I do for them?

ISMENE.

Their only hope, they say, is plac'd in thee.

ŒDIPUS.

I, that am nothing, grown so pow'rful! whence
Can it proceed?

ISMENE.

The gods, who once depress'd thee,
Now raise thee up again.

ŒDIPUS.

It cannot be;
Who falls in youth will never rise in age.

ISMENE.

Know, for this very purpose Creon comes;
Ere long thou may'st expect him.

ŒDIPUS.

What to do,

My daughter?

ISMENE.

To remove thee hence, and place thee
Nearer to Thebes, but not within her borders.

ŒDIPUS.

If not within, what profit can it be
To them?

ISMENE.

Thy tomb, rais'd in a foreign land,
They fear wou'd prove most fatal.

ŒDIPUS.

But how know they
It must be so, unless some god declar'd it?

ISMENE.

For this alone they wish to have thee near
The borders, in their pow'r, and not thy own.

ŒDIPUS.

To bury me at Thebes?

ISMENE.

That cannot be;
Thy crime forbids it.

ŒDIPUS.

Then I'll never go.

ISMENE.

A time will come when they shall feel thy vengeance.

ŒDIPUS.

What strange vicissitude can e'er produce
This wish'd event?

ISMENE.

Thy wrath, when at thy tomb
They shall be forc'd to meet.

ŒDIPUS.

Who told thee this?
Ismene, say.

ISMENE.

The sacred ministers
Of Delphos.

ŒDIPUS.

Came it from Apollo's shrine?

ISMENE.

On their return to Thebes they did report it.

ŒDIPUS.

My sons, did they hear aught of this?

ISMENE.

Both heard,
And know it well.

ŒDIPUS.

Yet, impious as they are,
Prefer'd a kingdom to their father's love.

ISMENE.

With grief I tell thee what with grief I heard.

ŒDIPUS.

O! may the gods doom them to endless strife;
Ne'er may the battle cease, till Œdipus
Himself shall end it! then, nor he who bears
The sceptre now, shou'd long maintain the throne,
Nor Polynices e'er to Thebes return;
They shou'd not live, who drove a parent forth
To misery and exile; left by those
Who shou'd have lov'd, supported, and rever'd him;
I know they say, the city but complied
With my request, I ask'd for banishment;
Not then I ask'd it: in my desp'rate mind
When first I rag'd, I wish'd indeed for death;
It had been grateful then, but no kind friend
Wou'd minister the boon; at length my grief
Gave way, and when they saw my troubled soul
Had taken ample vengeance on itself,
After long stay, the city drove me forth;
And those who cou'd have sav'd me, my base sons,
Deaf to a father's pray'rs, permit me still
To roam abroad, in poverty and exile:
From these alone, far as their tender sex
Can help me, I receive the means of life,

All the sweet comfort, food, or needful rest,
Earth can afford me now; whilst to my sons
A throne was dearer than a father's love;
But they shall never gain me for their friend,
Ne'er reign in Thebes; these oracles declare
They never shall; I do remember too
Another prophecy, which Phœbus erst
Deliver'd to me: let 'em send their Creon,
Or any other pow'rful citizen,
To drag me hence: my hospitable friends,
If to those all-protecting deities
Who here preside, you too will lend your aid,
Athens shall find in me its best defence,
And vengeance strike the foes of Œdipus.

CHORUS.

Thou and thy daughters well deserve our pity;
And, for thy words are full of promis'd good
To our lov'd city, I will tell thee all
'Tis meet thou should'st perform.

ŒDIPUS.

My best of friends,
Instruct me; I am ready to obey.

CHORUS.

An expiation instant must thou make

An expiation, &c. The remains of the antient drama, exclusive of their intrinsic merit with regard to its more essential parts, are extremely valuable, merely for the insight which they occasionally give us into almost every religious ceremony practised in earlier ages. Nothing can be more precise or complete than this account of an expiation: the cup, which is to be of a peculiar form, must be bound with wreaths of wool; that wool must be from a new-shorn lamb; the water drawn from three different fountains, mixed with honey, and every drop poured out; olive boughs must be held in the hand, and the whole done in the deepest silence. However ridiculous or absurd these circumstances may appear to us, we need not doubt but on the Athenian stage they must have cast an air of great solemnity over this scene, and have been well received by a Grecian audience. Our own Sophocles has trod the same path with success; his witches and fairies fell in with the superstitions

To the offended pow'rs whose sacred seat
Thou hast profan'd.

ŒDIPUS.

But, how must it be done?

CHORUS.

First, with pure hands, from th' ever-flowing spring,
Thy due libations pour.

ŒDIPUS.

What follows then?

CHORUS.

Take thou a cup, wrought by some skilful hand,
Bind it with wreaths around.

ŒDIPUS.

Of leaves or threads
Compos'd?

CHORUS.

Of wool, fresh from the new-shorn lamb.

ŒDIPUS.

Is there aught else?

CHORUS.

Then, turning to the sun,
Make thy libations.

ŒDIPUS.

From the cup, thou say'st.

CHORUS.

The water from three fountains drawn; and last
Remember, none be left.

ŒDIPUS

With that alone
Must it be fill'd?

CHORUS.

Water with honey mix'd,
No wine; this pour on th' earth——

ŒDIPUS.

What then remains?

of his contemporaries, and not only secured their attention, but the applause and admiration of posterity.

CHORUS.

Take in thy hand of olive-boughs thrice nine;
And off'ring these, begin thy humble pray'r.

ŒDIPUS.

But how address them? that concerns me near.

CHORUS.

Their name thou know'st implies, benevolent;
Intreat them therefore kindly now to prove
Benevolent to thee; but, remember,
Low be the voice, and short the supplication;
That done, return: be careful to perform it;
I may assist thee then with confidence,
But if thou dost it not, must tremble for thee.

ŒDIPUS.

My daughters, heard you this?

ANTIGONE.

We did; command
What's to be done.

ŒDIPUS.

What I can never do,
Pow'rless and blind as I am; one of you,
My daughters, must perform it.

ANTIGONE.

One alone

Olive boughs. These were some of the 'κλαδοι ικτηριοι,' or 'supplica-'ting boughs,' mentioned in the first scene of the Œdipus Tyrannus: they were generally laurel or olive,

Vittatæ laurus, & supplicis arbor olivæ. STATIUS.

The number nine was always accounted mysterious, for various reasons assigned by the commentators.

Their name, &c. The furies were called Ευμενιδες, 'Eumenides,' i. e. 'favourable or propitious,' for many reasons given by the Scholiasts, &c. none of which are very satisfactory: some say, by an antiphrasis (like Lucus a non lucendo) being the direct contrary; others give them this appellation because their true names were considered as unlucky, and not to be pronounced. They might after all, perhaps, be called 'Eu-'menides' in the strictest sense, as being favourable to those who had been injured, and the avengers of all impiety.

May do the task of many, when the mind
Is active in it.

ŒDIPUS.

Hence then, quick, away;
But do not leave me here alone; these limbs,
Without a guide, will never find their way.

ISMENE.

Father, I go: but how to find the place
I know not.

CHORUS.

Stranger, t'other side o' th' grove;
There, some inhabitant will soon inform thee,
If thou should'st want assistance, or instruction.

ISMENE.

Mean time, Antigone, remain thou here,
And guard our father well: cares are not cares,
When we endure them for a parent's sake.

[*Exit* ISMENE.

SCENE VII.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Stranger, albeit we know 'tis most ungrateful
To raise the sad remembrance of past woes,
Yet wou'd we gladly hear——

ŒDIPUS.

What would'st thou know?

CHORUS.

The cause of thy unhappy state.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas!
By all the sacred hospitable rites,
I beg thee do not ask me to reveal it;
My crimes are horrible.

CHORUS.

Already fame

Hath spread them wide, and still talks loudly of them;
Tell us the truth.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas!

CHORUS.

Let me beseech thee!

ŒDIPUS.

O! me!

CHORUS.

Comply: ask what thou wilt of me,
And thou shalt have it.

ŒDIPUS.

I have suffer'd much;
The gods can witness 'twas against my will;
I knew not of it.

CHORUS.

Knew not what?

ŒDIPUS.

The city,
Unknowing too, bound me in horrid nuptials.

CHORUS.

And did'st thou then pollute, as fame reports,
Thy mother's bed?

ŒDIPUS.

O! death to hear! I did:
Here, here they are.

CHORUS.

Who's there?

ŒDIPUS.

My crimes! my daughters!

CHORUS.

Daughters and sisters of their father? Oh!
'Tis horrible indeed.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis woe on woe.

CHORUS.

Great Jove! both daughters of one hapless mother!

What hast thou suffer'd?

ŒDIPUS.

Ills not to be borne!

CHORUS.

Didst thou then perpetrate the horrid deed?

ŒDIPUS.

O! no!

CHORUS.

Not do it?

ŒDIPUS.

I receiv'd from Thebes
A fatal gift; wou'd I had never ta'en it!

CHORUS.

And art thou not a murd'rer too?

ŒDIPUS.

What's that
Thou say'st?

CHORUS.

Thy father ——

ŒDIPUS.

Thou add'st grief to grief.

CHORUS.

Didst thou not murder him?

ŒDIPUS.

I did: but hear ——

CHORUS.

Hear what?

ŒDIPUS.

The cause.

CHORUS.

What cause?

ŒDIPUS.

I'll tell thee'; know then,
I murder'd others too, yet by the laws

A fatal gift. Meaning the throne of Thebes, with Jocasta, whom he married.

I stand aboslv'd; 'twas done in ignorance.

CHORUS *(seeing* THESEUS, *who enters.)*

But, lo! the king, Ægean Theseus, comes;
The fame of thee hath brought him here already.

SCENE VIII.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

O! son of Laius, long ere this the tale
Of thy disastrous fate, by many a tongue
Related, I had heard; thy eyes torn forth
By thy own desp'rate hand, and now I see
It was too true: thy garb and dreadful aspect
Speak who thou art: unhappy Œdipus,
I come to ask in pity to thy woes,
What's thy request to Athens or to me;
Thine, or this hapless virgin on thy steps
Attendant; speak; for large must be the boon
I wou'd refuse thee; I have known too well,
Myself a wretched wanderer, the woes
Of cruel exile, not to pity thine;
Of toils and dangers, in a foreign land,
Much have I suffer'd, therefore not to me
Shall the poor stranger ever sue in vain
For aid and safety: mortals as we are,
Uncertain ever is to-morrow's fate,
Alike unknown to Theseus and to thee.

Much have I suffer'd. This is almost literally translated by Virgil, in his speech of Dido to Æneas;

Me quoque per multos similis fortuna labores
Jactatum, hac demum voluit consistere terra.
Non ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco.

Nothing can be more amiable than the character of Theseus; he receives, pities, and comforts the unfortunate exile; in return for his generosity, Œdipus gives him the most solemn assurances of future happiness, with certain success and victory to the whole state of Athens.

ŒDIPUS.

Theseus, thy words declare thy noble nature,
And leave me little to reply: thou know'st
My story, who, and whence I am; no more
Remains, but that I tell thee my request,
And we have done.

THESEUS.

Proceed then, and inform me.

ŒDIPUS.

I come to give this wretched body to thee,
To sight ungracious, but of worth more dear
To thee, than fairest forms cou'd boast.

THESEUS.

What worth?

ŒDIPUS.

Hereafter thou shalt know, not now.

THESEUS.

But when
Shall we receive it?

ŒDIPUS.

When I am no more;
When thou shalt bury me.

THESEUS.

Death is, it seems,
Thy chief concern, and life not worth thy care.

ŒDIPUS.

That will procure me all the means of life.

THESEUS.

And is this all thou ask'st, this little boon?

ŒDIPUS.

Not little is the strife which shall ensue.

THESEUS.

What strife? with whom? thy children, or my own?

ŒDIPUS.

Mine, Theseus; they wou'd have me back to Thebes.

THESEUS.

And would'st thou rather be an exile here?

ŒDIPUS.

Once they refus'd me.

THESEUS.

Anger suits but ill
With low estate, and miseries like thine.

ŒDIPUS.

Hear first, and then condemn me.

THHSEUS.

Not unheard
All thou canst urge, wou'd I reprove thee; speak.

ŒDIPUS.

O! Theseus, I have borne the worst of ills.

THESEUS.

The curses on thy race?

ŒDIPUS.

O! no! all Greece
Hath heard of them.

THESEUS.

What more than mortal woe
Afflicts thee then?

ŒDIPUS.

E'en this: my cruel sons
Have driv'n me from my country; never more
Must Thebes receive a parricide.

THESEUS.

Why then
Recall thee now, if thou must ne'er return?

ŒDIPUS.

Commanded by an oracle divine.

THESEUS.

Why, what doth it declare?

ŒDIPUS.

That Thebes shall yield

That Thebes shall yield, &c. Those, who are acquainted with the Grecian history, and the many battles fought between the Thebans and Athenians, will easily perceive the design of Sophocles in this agreeable flattery of his countrymen. The abbé Sallier has gone so far as to make

To thee, and to thy arms.

THESEUS.

But whence shou'd spring
Such dire contention?

ŒDIPUS.

Dearest son of Ægeus,
From age and death exempt, the gods alone
Immortal and unchangeable remain,
Whilst all things else fall by the hand of time,
The universal conqu'ror: earth laments
Her fertile pow'rs exhausted; human strength
Is wither'd soon; e'en faith and truth decay,
And from their ashes fraud and falshood rise;
Nor friendship long from man to man endures,
Or realm to realm; to each, successive rise
Bitter and sweet, and happiness and woe.
Athens and Thebes thou see'st united now,
And all is well; but, passing time shall bring
The fatal day (and slight will be the cause)
That soon shall change the bonds of amity
And holy faith, for feuds and deadliest hate:
Then buried long in earth, shall this cold corse
Drink their warm blood, which from the mutual wound
Frequent shall flow; it must be as I tell thee,
If Jove be Jove, and great Apollo true.
But why shou'd I reveal the fix'd decree

the whole of this tragedy political, and alluding throughout to the circumstances of the times in which it was written. He fixes the date of it to a particular period of the Peloponnesian war, and endeavours to explain several passages in favour of his opinion; but I refer my readers to his ingenious dissertation, which they will find in the sixth volume of the Histoire de l'Academie des Inscriptions, &c. p. 385.

From age and death, &c. This just and beautiful sentiment is, with great propriety, put into the mouth of Œdipus, whose age and misfortunes would naturally incline him to moral reflections, in which the Œdipus Coloneus seems peculiarly to abound, and which render this play perhaps not the most interesting in its circumstances, at least more instructive and agreeable than any of the rest.

Of all-deciding heav'n? Permit me now
To end where I began; thy plighted faith
Once more confirm, and never shalt thou say
The wretched Œdipus to Theseus came
An useless and unprofitable guest,
If the immortal gods have not deceiv'd me.

CHORUS.

O! king, already hath this man declar'd
The same good will to thee and to our country.

THESEUS.

Can I reject benevolence and love
Like this, my friends? O! no! the common rites
Of hospitality, this altar here,
The witness of our mutual vows, forbid it;
He comes a suppliant to the goddesses,
And pays no little tribute both to me
And to my kingdom; he shall find a seat
Within my realms, for I revere his virtues:
If here it pleaseth him to stay, remember [*to the* CHORUS.
'Tis my command you guard this stranger well.
If thou would'st rather go with me, thou may'st;
I leave it to thy choice. [*to* ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS.

Reward them, Jove.

THESEUS.

What say'st thou, wilt thou follow me?

ŒDIPUS.

I wou'd,
If it were lawful, but it must be here ——
This is the place ——

THESEUS.

For what? I'll not deny thee ——

ŒDIPUS.

Where I must conquer those who banish'd me.

THESEUS.

That wou'd be glory and renown to this
Thy place of refuge.

ŒDIPUS.

If I may depend
On thy fair promise.

THESEUS.

Fear not, I shall ne'er
Betray my friend.

ŒDIPUS.

I will not bind thee to it
By oath, like those whom we suspect of ill.

THESEUS.

Thou need'st not, Œdipus, my word's my oath.

ŒDIPUS.

How must I act then?

THESEUS.

Fear'st thou aught?

ŒDIPUS.

I do.
A force will come against me.

THESEUS *(pointing to the* CHORUS.)

Here's thy guard;
These shall protect thee.

ŒDIPUS.

If thou goest, remember
And save me, Theseus.

THESEUS.

Teach not me my duty.

ŒDIPUS.

Still am I fearful.

THESEUS.

Theseus is not so.

ŒDIPUS.

Know'st thou not what they threaten'd?

THESEUS.

This I know,
No pow'r on earth shall wrest thee from this place.
Oft-times the angry soul will vent its wrath
In idle threats, with high and empty words,

Which ever, as the mind is to itself
Restor'd, are—nothing: they may boast their strength,
And say they'll tear thee from me; but, I tell thee,
The journey wou'd be long and tedious to them;
They will not hazard it, they dare not: therefore
Be comforted, for if by Phœbus sent
Thou hither cam'st, thou'rt safe without my aid,
E'en if I leave thee safe; for know, the name
Of Theseus here sufficeth to protect thee.

[*Exit* THESEUS.

SCENE IX.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thou art come in happy time,
Stranger, to this blissful clime,
Long for swiftest steeds renown'd,
Fertil'st of the regions round,
Where, beneath the ivy shade,
In the dew-besprinkled glade,
Many a love-lorn nightingale
Warbles sweet her plaintive tale,
Where the vine in clusters pours
Her sweets, secur'd from wintry show'rs,

Thou art come, &c. This is the first song or intermede of the Chorus, who, in most beautiful language (for so it is in the original) sing the praises of Attica; the extraordinary fertility of its soil, knowledge of horsemanship, and skill in naval affairs. Sophocles has apparently taken this opportunity to celebrate the place of his birth, and at the same time pay a compliment to his countrymen; one may easily imagine with what applause it must have been received by an Athenian audience.

This Chorus closes the act, which the reader may observe, is of a most enormous length, and unproportionable to the rest. Brumoy, to avoid the absurdity, begins the second act at the first entrance of Theseus, and calls this the second intermede, though he forgets to tell us which is the first.

Nor scorching suns, nor raging storm
The beauties of the year deform.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where the sweet Narcissus growing,
Where the yellow Crocus blowing,
Round the sacred altars twine,
Off'ring to the pow'rs divine;
Where the pure springs perpetual flow,
Wat'ring the verdant meads below,
Which with its earth-enriching waves
The fair Cephisus ever laves.
Where, with his ever-sporting train,
Bacchus wantons on the plain;
Pleas'd with the Muses still to rove,
And golden Venus, queen of love.

STROPHE II.

Alone within this happy land,
Planted here by nature's hand,
Which, nor Asia's fertile plains,
Nor Pelops' spacious isle contains,
Pallas, thy sacred olive grows;
Striking terror on our foes,
Ever free from hostile rage,
From wanton youth, or greedy age;
Happy in sage Minerva's love,
And guarded still by Morian Jove.

ANTISTROPHE II.

But nobler gifts, and fairer fame,
Athens, yet adorn thy name;

Thy sacred olive. These olives were called 'Μοριαι,' or 'Moriæ,' for some reasons, not very material, assigned by the commentators: it is sufficient to observe, that as the favourite trees of Minerva, the protectress of Athens, they were held sacred, and whoever cut them down was deemed accursed; for which reason, it is said, that when the Lacedæmonians invaded Attica, these alone were spared in the general devastation.

Such wond'rous gifts hath pour'd on thee,
Thy great protecting deity;
Here first obedient to command,
Form'd by Neptune's skilful hand,
The steed was taught to know the rein,
And bear the chariot o'er the plain:
Here first along the rapid tide,
The stately vessels learn'd to ride;
And swifter down the current flow
Than Nereids cut the waves below. [*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.

ANTIGONE, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

GREAT are thy praises, Attica, and now
The time is come to shew thou dost deserve them.

ŒDIPUS.

What means my daughter? Speak; what new event
Alarms thee?

ANTIGONE.

Creon, with a num'rous band
Of follow'rs, comes this way.

ŒDIPUS.

O! now, my friends,
If ever, help me.

CHORUS.

Fear not, we'll protect thee.
Though I am old, the strength of Attica
Is not decay'd.

SCENE II.

CREON, WITH ATTENDANTS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

Most honour'd citizens,
I see you look with eyes of fear upon me,
Without a cause; for know, I came not here
Intending aught of violence or ill
Against a city, so renown'd in Greece
As yours hath ever been; I only came,
Commission'd by the state of Thebes, to fetch
This old man back, if by persuasion mild
I cou'd induce him to return; not sent
By one alone, but the united voice
Of a whole people, who assign'd the task
To me, because, by blood united to him,
I felt for his misfortunes as my own.
Come therefore, Œdipus, attend me home,
Thebes calls thee back, thy kingdom now demands thee,
By me she calls thee; listen to thy friend,
For surely Creon were the worst of men,
If he cou'd look on woes like thine unmov'd;
When I behold thee in a foreign land
A wretched wand'rer, forc'd to beg thy bread
From place to place, with this unhappy maid,
Whom little did I think to see expos'd
To misery and shame, of nuptial rites
Hopeless, and thus bereft of ev'ry aid:
O! 'tis reproach and infamy to us
And to our race; but 'tis already known,
And cannot be conceal'd: O! Œdipus,
I here beseech thee, by our country's gods,
Return to Thebes, bid thou a kind farewell,

For she deserves it, to this noble city,
But still remember thy own dearer country.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou daring hypocrite, whose specious wiles
Beneath fair semblance mean but to betray,
Why would'st thou tempt me thus? why thus once more
Ensnare me in thy toils, and make me still
More wretched than I am? Long time oppress'd
By heaviest woes, I pin'd within my palace,
And long'd for exile, but you then refus'd
To let me go, till satiated with grief
My soul at length was calm, and much I wish'd
To spend my few remaining years at home;
Then thou, for little did the kindred blood
Thou talk'st of then avail, didst banish me;
And now again thou com'st to make me wretched.
Because thou see'st this kind benignant city
Embrace and cherish, thou would'st drag me hence,
With sweetest words cov'ring thy bitter mind,
Professing love to those who choose it not:
He, who denies his charitable aid
To the poor beggar in his utmost need,
And if abundance comes, shou'd offer that
Which is not wanted, little merits thanks.
Such is thy bounty now, in word alone
And not in deed, the friend of Œdipus.
But I will tell them what thou art; thou cam'st not
To take me hence, but leave me in the borders
Of Thebes, that so thy kingdom may escape
Th' impending ills which this avenging city
Shall pour upon it; but 'twill come to pass
As I foretold, my evil genius still
Shall haunt you, and my sons no more of Thebes
Inherit than shall serve them for a grave.
Thy country's fate is better known to me
Than to thyself, for my instruction comes
From surer guides, from Phœbus and from Jove,

Thy artful speech shall little serve thy purpose,
'Twill only hurt thy cause: therefore begone;
I'm not to be persuaded. Let me live
In quiet here, for wretched as I am,
'Twill be some comfort to be far from thee.

CREON.

Think'st thou I heed thy words? Who'll suffer most
For this perverseness, thou, or I?

ŒDIPUS.

Thy little arts will nought avail with me,
Or with my friends.

CREON.

Poor wretch! no time can cure
Thy follies, thy old age is grown delirious.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou hast a hateful tongue; but few, how just
Soe'er they be, can always speak aright.

CREON.

But to say much, and to say well, are things
Which differ widely.

ŒDIPUS.

What thou say'st no doubt
Is brief, and proper too.

CREON.

'Twill hardly seem so
To those, who think like thee,

ŒDIPUS.

Away, nor dare
Direct my steps, as if thou had'st the pow'r
To place me where thou wilt.

CREON.

Remember all
To witness this, for he shall answer it
When he is mine.

ŒDIPUS.

But who shall force me hence
Against the will of these my friends?

CREON.

Their aid
Is vain; already I have done what much
Will hurt thee.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! what threats are these?

CREON.

Thy daughters
Must go with me; one is secur'd, and now
This moment will I wrest the other from thee.

ŒDIPUS.

O! me!

CREON.

I'll give thee much more cause for grief.

ŒDIPUS.

Hast thou my daughter;

CREON.

Aye, and will have this.

ŒDIPUS *(to the* CHORUS.*)*

What will you do, my friends? Will you forsake me?
Will you not drive this vile abandon'd man
Forth from your city?

CHORUS.

Stranger, hence, away;
Thy actions are most shameful and unjust.

CREON.

Slaves, do your office; bear her off by force,
If she consents not.

ANTIGONE.

Whither shall I fly
For aid? What god or man shall I implore
To succour me?

CHORUS.

Alas! what would'st thou do?

CREON.

I touch not him, but I must have my own,

ANTIGONE.

O! princes, aid me now!

CHORUS.

'Tis most unjust.

CREON.

I say 'tis just.

CHORUS.

Then prove it.

CREON.

They are mine.

CHORUS.

O! citizens!

ANTIGONE.

O! loose me! if you do not,
You shall repent this violence.

CREON.

Go on,
I will defend you.

ŒDIPUS.

He, who injures me,
Offends the city.

CHORUS.

Said I not before
It won'd be thus?

CREON *(to the* CHORUS.)

Let go the maid this instant.

CHORUS.

Command where thou hast power.

CREON.

Let her go.

CHORUS.

Begone thyself: what, ho! my countrymen,
The city is in danger; haste and save us.

[CREON'S *followers seize on* ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

I'm seiz'd, my friends, O! help!

ŒDIPUS.

Where is my daughter?

ANTIGONE.

Torn from thee.

ŒDIPUS.

O! stretch forth thy hand.

ANTIGONE.

I cannot.

CREON,

Away with her.

ŒDIPUS.

O! wretched Œdipus!

CREON.

No longer shall these tender props support
Thy feeble age; since thou art still resolv'd
Against thyself, thy country, and thy friends,
By whose command I come, remain perverse
And obstinate, old man; but know, hereafter
Time will convince thee thou hast ever been
Thy own worst foe; thy fiery temper still
Must make thee wretched.

CHORUS.

Stranger, stir not hence.

CREON.

I charge you, touch me not.

CHORUS.

Thou shalt not go,
Till thou restor'st the virgins.

CREON.

I must have
A nobler ransom from your city, these
Shall not suffice.

No longer, &c. Meaning his daughters, Antigone and Ismene: the literal translation would be 'Thou shalt no longer walk, leaning on these 'sticks.' A little farther on, Œdipus calls Antigone 'Φίλον ὄμμα,' 'his 'only eye:' passages of this nature, the reader will easily perceive, must be softened a little in the translation.

CHORUS.

What mean'st thou?

CREON.

He shall go,
This Œdipus.

CHORUS.

Thy threats are terrible.

CREON.

I'll do't; and only he, who governs here,
Shall hinder me.

ŒDIPUS.

O! insolence! thou wilt not,
Thou dar'st not force me.

CREON.

Hold thy peace.

ŒDIPUS.

Not e'en
The dreadful goddesses, who here preside,
Shou'd bind my tongue from heaviest curses on thee,
For thou hast robb'd me of the only light
These eyes cou'd boast; but may th' all-seeing sun
Behold and punish thee and all thy race,
And load thy age with miseries like mine!

CREON.

Inhabitants of Athens, hear ye this?

ŒDIPUS.

They do, and see that but with fruitless words
I can repay the inj'ries I receive;
For I am weak with age, and here alone.

CREON.

No longer will I curb my just resentment,
But force thee hence.

ŒDIPUS.

O! me!

For I am weak, &c. This line in the original is, I think, very absurdly put into the mouth of Creon; I have taken the liberty to give it to Œdipus, from whom it certainly comes with more propriety.

CHORUS.

What boldness, stranger,
Cou'd make thee hope to do a deed like this
Unpunish'd?

CREON.

'Tis resolv'd.

CHORUS.

Our Athens then
Is fall'n indeed, and is no more a city.

CREON.

In a just cause the weak may foil the mighty.

ŒDIPUS.

Hear how he threatens ——

CHORUS.

What he'll ne'er perform.

CREON.

That Jove alone can tell.

CHORUS.

Shall injuries
Like these be suffer'd?

CREON.

Call it injury,
Thou may'st, 'tis such as thou perforce must bear.

CHORUS.

This is too much: ye rulers of the land
My fellow-citizens, come forth, and save us.

SCENE III.

THESEUS, CREON, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

Whence is this clamour? wherefore am I call'd
From sacred rites at Neptune's altar paid,
Our guardian god? say, what's the cause that thus
In haste I'm summon'd hither?

ŒDIPUS.

O! my friend,
For well I know thy voice, most cruelly
Have I been treated by this man.

THESEUS.

Who did it?

ŒDIPUS.

This Creon, whom thou see'st, hath ravish'd from me
My only help, my daughters.

THESEUS.

Ha! what say'st thou?

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis as I tell thee.

THESEUS *(to his Attendants.)*

Quick, dispatch my servants,
Fly to the altar, summon all my people,
Horsemen and foot; give o'er the sacrifice,
And instant to the double gate repair,
Lest with the virgins the base ravishers
Escape unpunish'd, and my guest thus injur'd
Laugh me to scorn for cowardice. Away.
Were I to punish this oppressor here
[*turning to* CREON.
As my resentment bids, and he deserves,
He shou'd this instant fall beneath my rage;
But the same justice, he to others deals,
Himself shall meet from us; thou shalt not go
Till those, whom thou didst basely ravish hence,
Are brought before me: 'twas unlike thyself,
Unworthy of thy country and thy race,
To enter thus a cultivated city,
Where law and justice reign, with violence
And rapine, snatching what thy fancy pleas'd.
Or didst thou think I rul'd a desart land,
Or that my people were a race of slaves,
And Theseus but the shadow of a king?
Thebes never taught thee such destructive lessons,

For she abhors injustice; when she hears
That Creon, thus despising sacred laws,
Hath ta'en with brutal violence my right,
And wou'd have stol'n a wretched suppliant from me,
She'll not approve thy conduct: say I went
To Thebes, how just soever were the cause,
I shou'd not seize on aught without the leave
Of him who govern'd there; but, as becomes
A stranger, bear myself unblam'd by all.
Thou hast disgrac'd thy country, and thy friends,
And weight of years hath ta'en thy senses from thee;
Again I say, restore the virgins to me,
Or stay with me thyself, for so thou shalt,
Howe'er unwilling; what I've said, remember,
Is what I have resolv'd, therefore determine

CHORUS (*to* CREON.)

Stranger, thy actions, noble as thou art,
But ill become thy family and name,
Because unjust; but thou behold'st thy fate.

CREON.

Theseus, it was not that I thought this city
Without or guards to save, or laws to rule,
Which brought me here, nor unadvis'd I came,
But that I hop'd you never wou'd receive
My kindred here against my will, nor e'er
Embrace a vile incestuous parricide.
Or cherish and protect him, in a land
Whose court, renown'd for justice, suffers not
Such poor abandon'd exiles to reside
Within its borders; therefore did I this,
Which yet I had not done, but for the curses
Which he hath pour'd on me, and all my race;
Revenge inspir'd me: anger, well thou know'st,
Can never be extinguish'd but by death,
Which closeth ev'ry wound: at present, Theseus,
It must be as thou wilt; my want of pow'r,
How just soe'er my cause, demands submission;

Yet old and weak, I shall not tamely yield.

ŒDIPUS.

Audacious man! think'st thou the vile reproach,
Thou utter'st, falls on me, or on thyself?
Thou who upbraid'st me thus for all my woes,
Murder and incest, which against my will
I had committed; so it pleas'd the gods,
Offended at my race for former crimes,
But I am guiltless; canst thou name a fault
Deserving this? for tell me, was it mine,
When to my father Phœbus did declare
That he shou'd one day perish by the hand
Of his own child; was Œdipus to blame,
Who had no being then? if, born at length
To wretchedness, he met his sire unknown,
And slew him, that involuntary deed
Canst thou condemn? and for my fatal marriage,
Dost thou not blush to name it? was not she
Thy sister, she who bore me, ignorant
And guiltless woman! afterwards my wife,
And mother to my children? what she did,
She did unknowing; not like thee, who thus
Dost purposely upbraid us both; heav'n knows
Unwillingly I wedded her, and now
Unwillingly repeat the dreadful tale;
But, nor for that, nor for my murder'd father,
Have I deserv'd thy bitter taunts; for tell me,
Thy life attack'd, would'st thou have staid to ask
Th' assassin if he were thy father? no,
Self-love wou'd urge thee to revenge the insult:
Thus was I drove to ill by th' angry gods;
This, shou'd my father's soul revisit earth,
Himself wou'd own, and pity Œdipus.
Thy bold and impious tongue still utters all;
Just or unjust thou pour'st thy foul reproach
On me, pretending to revere the name
Of Theseus and his country; but remember,

The city, whom thou thus hast prais'd, is fam'd
For piety, and rev'rence to the gods;
Yet would'st thou drive a needy suppliant thence,
And lead him captive; thou hast stol'n my daughter,
But I implore the dreadful goddesses
To grant me aid, that thou may'st feel the pow'r
Which thou contemn'st, and know the force of Athens.

CHORUS *(to* THESEUS.)

O! king, this stranger merits thy regard,
His woes are great, his cause shou'd be defended.

THESEUS.

No more, the ravishers are fled with speed,
Whilst we, who suffer, stand inactive here.

CREON.

Speak thy commands, for I must yield to thee.

THESEUS.

Go thou before me, I shall follow close;
If here thou hast conceal'd the virgins, now
Discover them; if hence, to other's hands
Committed, they are fled, they shall not 'scape,
My servants soon will fetch them back; mean time
Remember thy condition, for thy fate
Hath caught thee in the net which thou hadst spread
For others; but, what evil means acquire
Is seldom kept: thou cam'st not naked here,
Or unattended, thus to do an act
Of violence; ere long I'll know on what
Thou didst rely, nor by a single arm
Shall Athens fall inglorious: hear'st thou this,
Or are my words unheeded?

CREON.

'Tis not now
A time to answer; we shall know at home

What evil means, &c. This maxim is adopted by Plautus, in his Pœnulus, 'malé partum malé disperit.' We have likewise a proverb of our own, though it is rather a coarse one, expressive of the same sentiment, viz. 'What is got over the devil's back is spent under his belly.'

What must be done.

THESEUS.

Thou threat'nest; but go on.
Stay thou in quiet here, for if I live,

[*turning to* ŒDIPUS.

I will not rest till I restore thy daughters.

[*Exeunt* THESEUS *and* CREON.

SCENE IV.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Now the combatants prepare,
And hasten to the field of war,
Theseus, their great and god-like friend,
The hapless virgins shall defend.
O! cou'd I hear the dreadful battle roar,
Or near Apollo's sacred shrine,
Or on the torch-enlighten'd shore,
Or Ceres, where thy priests their rites divine
Perform, with lips in solemn silence seal'd,
And myst'ries ne'er by mortal tongue reveal'd.

Now the combatants, &c. This is the second song, or intermede of the Chorus, who, imagining from what had passed in the preceding scene, that a battle must inevitably follow between Theseus and Creon, form various conjectures concerning the place where it would be fought: relying on the strength and valour of their countrymen, to whom they presage certain victory. This gives time for the recovery of Antigone and Ismene, and prepares the audience for the events in the next act.

On the torch-enlighten'd shore. Torches were carried in the Eleusinian rites, probably in memory of those which Ceres and her attendants are supposed to have made use of in their search after Proserpine; these mysteries were performed by night in the most solemn manner by the Eumolpidæ, or priests of Ceres; none were admitted to them but the pure and unspotted, who were bound to inviolable secrecy.

ANTISTROPHE I.

At yon snowy mountain's feet
Westward perchance the warriors meet;
Chariot and horse with mutual rage
On Œta's flow'ry plains engage;
Around their Theseus now, a valiant band,
See Athens' martial sons unite
To save their native land;
All shake their glitt'ring spears, and urge the fight;
All, who thy pow'r, Equestrian Pallas, own,
Or bow to Neptune, Rhea's honour'd son.

STROPHE II.

The bloody scene shall soon be o'er,
Creon the virgin shall restore;
My soul prophetic sees the maid
For pious duty thus repaid;
For ever active is the pow'r of Jove,
From whom perpetual blessings flow:
O! that I now cou'd, like the dove,
Soar thro' the skies, and mark the field below,
The wish'd-for conquest joyful to behold,
And triumph in the vict'ry I foretold!

ANTISTROPHE II.

Thou pow'r supreme, all pow'rs above,
All-seeing, all-performing Jove,
Grant that the rulers of this land
May soon subdue the hostile band!
Thee, too, O! Pallas, hunter Phœbus, thee
Do we invoke, with thee be join'd
Thy virgin sister deity,
Who loves o'er lawns to chase the spotted hind;
On you we call, your aid propitious bring,
O! haste, protect our country and our king. [*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.

ŒDIPUS, THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMÉNE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

I'm no false prophet, stranger, for behold
Thy daughters.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! what say'st thou, where, O! where?

ANTIGONE.

My father, O! my father, what kind god
Rais'd up this friend who hath restor'd us to thee?

ŒDIPUS.

Are then my daughters with me?

ANTIGONE.

Theseus' arm
Hath brought us here: to him and to his friends
We owe our safety.

ŒDIPUS.

O! come nigh, my children,
Let me embrace you; never did I think
Again to fold you in these arms.

ANTIGONE.

We come
With joy, my father.

ŒDIPUS.

O! where are you?

ANTIGONE.

Here.

ŒDIPUS.

My dearest children!

ANTIGONE.

To our father still

May every pleasure come!

ŒDIPUS *(leaning on* ANTIGONE.)

My best support!

ANTIGONE.

The wretched bear the wretched.

ŒDIPUS *(embracing them.)*

I have all
That's precious to me; were I now to die,
Whilst you are here, I shou'd not be unhappy:
Support me, daughters, to your father's side
Close press'd: O! soothe to peace a wretched exile,
Long time deserted: tell me what hath happen'd,
But let the tale be short, as best becomes
Thy tender age.

ANTIGONE *(pointing to* THESEUS.)

Here is our great protector,
He will inform you; so shall what I speak
Be brief, as thou would'st have it.

ŒDIPUS.

Noble Theseus,
My children thus beyond my hopes restor'd,
If I shou'd talk too long on such a theme,
Thou wilt not wonder; 'tis to thee alone
I owe my joys; thou didst protect and save
My much-lov'd daughters; may the gods repay
Thee and thy kingdom for this goodness to me!
Here only have I found or faith, or truth,
Or justice; you alone possess them all;
I will attest it, for I know it well;
I feel your virtues; what I have is all
From you. O! king, permit me but to touch
Thy hand; O! stretch it forth, or let me kiss
Thy honour'd lips! but O! what do I say!
Can such a wretch as Œdipus e'er hope
With guilty hands to touch a man like thee,
So pure, so spotless? yet I must embrace thee;
They only who have known misfortune feel

For other's griefs with sympathising woe.
Hail! best of men, and may'st thou ever be,
As thou hast been, my guardian and my friend!

THESEUS.

Thus happy as thou must be in thy children,
Had'st thou said more, much more, and talk'd to them
Rather than me, it had not mov'd my wonder;
Nor think I shou'd resent it: not by words
Wou'd Theseus be distinguish'd, but by deeds
Illustrious; this thou know'st, for what I swore
I have perform'd, restor'd thy daughters to thee,
Safe from the tyrant's threats: how past the conflict
Why shou'd I boast? they at their leisure best
May tell you all: mean time to what I heard
As hither coming, Œdipus, attend:
Of little import seem'd the circumstance,
And yet 'twas strange; but nought shou'd mortal man
Deem or beneath his notice or his care.

ŒDIPUS.

What is it, son of Ægeus? O! inform me,
For nothing have I heard.

THESEUS.

A man, they say,
Who boasts himself by blood allied to thee,
At Neptune's altar, whilst I sacrific'd,
In humblest posture stood.

ŒDIPUS.

What cou'd it mean?
Whence came he?

THESEUS.

That I know not; this alone
They told me, suppliant he requested much
To talk a while with thee.

ŒDIPUS.

With me? 'tis strange,
And yet methinks important.

THESEUS.

He desir'd

But to converse with thee, and then depart.

ŒDIPUS.

Who can it be?

THESEUS.

Hast thou no friend at Argos,
None of thy kindred there who wish'd to see thee?

ŒDIPUS.

No more, my friend.

THESEUS.

What say'st thou?

ŒDIPUS.

Do not ask me.

THESEUS.

Ask what ——

ŒDIPUS.

I know him now; I know too well
Who's at the altar.

THESEUS.

Who is it?

ŒDIPUS.

My son;
That hateful son, whose voice I loathe to hear.

THESEUS.

But why not hear him? still thou may'st refuse
What he shall ask.

ŒDIPUS.

I cannot, cannot bear it:
Do not oblige me;

THESEUS.

But the sacred place,

I know him now. Œdipus is at first at a loss to guess who this stranger could be that enquired after him, but on recollection concludes it was his son. 'Antigone & sa sœur (says Brumoy) devinent que ce'st leur 'frere Polynice, & elles le disent à leur pere;' the French critic is here mistaken, for Œdipus is not told by his daughters, but imagines himself it must be Polynices, as soon as Theseus mentions his coming from Argos.

Where now he stands, and rev'rence to the gods,
Demand it of thee.

ANTIGONE.

Let me, O! my father,
Young as I am, admonish thee! O! grant
Thy friend his just request, obey the gods,
And let our brother come; whate'er he says
It need not draw thee from thy first resolve.
What harm to hear him? words have oft produc'd
The noblest works: remember 'tis thy child,
Thou didst beget him; tho' he were the worst
Of sons to thee, yet wou'd it ill become
A father to return it: let him come.
Others like thee have base unworthy children,
And yet their minds are soften'd to to forgiveness
By friends' advice, and all their wrath subdu'd.
Think on thy own unhappy parent's fate,
Thence may'st thou learn what dreadful ills have flow'd
From anger's bitter fountain; thou, alas!
Art a sad proof; those sightless eyes too well
Bear witness to it; those who only ask
What justice warrants shou'd not ask in vain,
Nor, who receives a benefit, forget
The hand that gave, but study to repay it.

ŒDIPUS.

You have o'ercome me: with reluctant pleasure
I yield; my children, be it as you please:
But if he comes, O! Theseus, guard my life.

THESEUS.

I've said enough; no more: I will not boast,
But thou art safe if heav'n forsakes not me.

With reluctant pleasure. The original is remarkably elegant: 'Βαρειαν 'ηδονην νικατη με.' I have endeavoured to render it as closely as possible.

SCENE II.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

In sacred wisdom's path is seldom seen
The wretch, whom sordid love of wealth inspires;
Neglectful of the happy golden mean,
His soul nor truth nor heav'nly knowledge fires:
No length of days to him can pleasure bring,
In death alone he finds repose,
End of his wishes and his woes;
In that uncomfortable night
Where never music's charms delight,
Nor virgin choirs their hymeneals sing.

ANTISTROPHE.

The happiest fate of man is not to be;
And next in bliss is he who soon as born,
From the vain world and all its sorrows free,
Shall whence he came with speediest foot return;
For youth is full of folly, toils, and woe,
Of war, sedition, pain, and strife,
With all the busy ills of life,
Till helpless age comes creeping on,
Deserted, friendless, and alone,
Which neither pow'r nor joy nor pleasure knows.

EPODE.

The hapless Œdipus, like me,
Is doom'd to age and misery;
E'en as around the northern shore
The bleak winds howl, and tempests roar,

In sacred wisdom's path. This is the third song, or intermede of the Chorus, who, shocked at the unparalleled misfortunes of Œdipus, fall into some melancholy reflections on the miseries of old age, and the unhappy condition of human life, in every period of it; this gives time and prepares the audience for the arrival of Polynices.

Contending storms in terror meet,
And dashing waves for ever beat;
Thus is the wretched king with grief oppress'd,
And woes on woes afflict his long-distemper'd breast.
[*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

This way, my father, lo! the wretched man
Approaches, unattended, and in tears.

ŒDIPUS.

Who comes, my child?

ANTIGONE.

E'en he I told thee of,
Poor Polynices.

SCENE II.

POLYNICES, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

POLYNICES.

O! my sisters, see
Of all mankind the most unhappy; where
Shall I begin? shall I lament my own,
Or shall I weep an aged parent's fate?

O! my sisters, &c. Nothing can be more artful, tender, and pathetic, than this speech of Polynices: conscious of his own guilt, and well acquainted with the fiery disposition of his father, he addresses himself first to his sisters, and then slides, as it were, insensibly into his modest and humble supplication, clothed in terms that must have moved any but the implacable Œdipus.

For O! 'tis horrible to find him thus
A wand'ring exile in a foreign land;
In this mean garb, with wild dishevell'd hair,
Bereft of sight, and destitute, perhaps,
Of needful food and nourishment; alas!
Too late I know it, worthless as I am,
I flew to succour him, to plead my cause,
That not from others he might hear the tale
Of my misfortunes; sacred pity sits
Fast by the throne of Jove, o'er all his works
Presiding gracious; O! let her inspire
Thy breast, my father; crimes already done,
Which cannot be recall'd, may still be heal'd
By kind forgiveness; why then art thou silent?
O! speak, my father, do not turn aside;
Wilt thou not answer? wilt thou let me go
Without one word; nor tell me whence thy wrath
Contemptuous springs? my sisters, you at least
Will try to move his unrelenting heart,
And loosen his clos'd lips, that not thus spurn'd
And thus unanswer'd, though a suppliant here
At Neptune's altar, I return with shame
And foul disgrace.

ANTIGONE.

Say, wherefore didst thou come,
My hapless brother? tell thy mournful tale;
Such is the pow'r of words, that whether sweet
They move soft pity, or when bitter urge
To violence and wrath, at least they ope
Th' unwilling lips, and make the silent speak.

POLYNICES.

'Tis well advis'd, and I will tell thee all.
O! may that deity propitious smile,
Whose altar late I left, whence Theseus rais'd
This wretched suppliant, and in converse free
Mix'd gracious with me! may I hope from you
The like benevolence? and now, my father,

I'll tell thee wherefore Polynices came.
Thou see'st me banish'd from my native land,
Unjustly banish'd, for no other crime
But that I strove to keep the throne of Thebes,
By birthright mine, from him, who drove me thence,
The young Eteocles: not his the claim
By justice, nor to me his fame in arms
Superior, but by soft persuasive arts
He won the rebel city to his love.
Thy curse, my father, was the cause of all,
I know it was; for so the priests declar'd
In oracles divine: to Argos then
I came, and to Adrastus' daughter join'd
In marriage, gain'd the Argive chiefs, renown'd
For martial deeds; sev'n valiant leaders march
To Thebes, resolv'd to conquer or to die.
Therefore to thee, my father, came I here,
To beg thy aid for me and these my friends,
Companions of the war, who threaten Thebes
With their united pow'rs, in order thus;
The wise and brave Amphiaraus, or skill'd
To cast the spear, or with prophetic tongue
Disclose the will of heav'n, with Œneus' son
Ætolian Tydeus, and Eteocles
At Argos born; to these Hippomedon
Sent by Talaus his renowned sire,
Bold Capaneus, who threatens soon to raze
The walls of mighty Thebes; to close the train,
Parthenopæan Arcas comes, the son
Of Atalantis, from her virgin name
So call'd: with these thy hapless son, (the child
Of dire misfortune rather) leads his force
From Argos to rebellious Thebes; for these,
And for their children, for the lives of all,

The wise and brave, &c. In the original, it is first Amphiaraus, 'second Tydeus, third Eteocles, &c.' but this would have appeared extremely harsh and awkward in a literal translation.

Suppliant to thee we come, in humble pray'r,
To deprecate thy wrath against a wretch
Who, injur'd much, but seeks the vengeance due
To a base brother, whose oppressive hand
Hath drove me from my country and my throne;
If there be truth in what the gods declare,
On him shall vict'ry smile, for whom thy vows
Shall rise propitious; therefore by our gods,
And native fountains, O! remit thy anger,
And smile upon me, on a banish'd man,
A beggar like thyself, who lives like thee
By others bounty; in one common fate
We are united, whilst the tyrant sits
In ease at home, and laughs our woes to scorn.
Yet if thou would'st but listen to my vows,
Soon might I cast him forth, restore thee soon
To thy dear native land, and seat myself
In my own kingdom: thy assent, my father,
Is all I ask; but, O! without thy aid,
I have no hope of safety or revenge.

CHORUS.

For Theseus' sake, O! give him answer now
And let him go.

ŒDIPUS.

But that the noble Theseus,
Who hither brought him did request it of me,
He ne'er had heard the voice of Œdipus;
And little pleasure will it now bestow:
Ungrateful wretch! who, when the throne of Thebes,
[*turning to* POLYNICES.
Where now thy brother sits, was thine, didst drive

But that the noble Theseus, &c. The curse, which Œdipus here pronounces against his sons, hath something in it very aweful and terrible; especially if we consider it as spoken before an audience thoroughly convinced that the curses of offended parents were always inflicted, and the prophecies of dying men always fulfilled. Nothing perhaps but Shakespear's Lear can exceed it.

Thy father hence, to penury and woe:
Now, when thou see'st me in this mean attire,
Thou weep'st my fate, because 'tis like thy own;
But I'll not weep, for I can bear it all,
Still, wicked parricide, rememb'ring thee,
The cruel cause of all; thou mad'st me thus
On other's bounty to rely for food
And nourishment; for thee, I might have perish'd,
But these my pious daughters, these alone,
Beyond their sex's pow'r, with manly aid
Have cherish'd and protected me: for you,
Who call yourselves my sons, ye are not mine,
I know you not; though heav'n hath spar'd you long
Death will o'ertake you; when thy forces come
To Thebes, which shall not fall before thy arms,
There soon shalt thou, and thy vile brother, die:
Long since my curses did declare thy fate,
Which here I do repeat, that you may learn
The rev'rence due to parents, and no more
Reproach a sightless father: look on these
My duteous daughters, did they act like you?
They never did; and therefore to the throne,
Which you have forfeited, shall they succeed,
If justice still, as she is ever wont,
Sits at the hand of Jove: mean time, thou worst,
Thou most abandon'd of the race of men,
Be gone, away, and with thee bear this curse
Which here I do pronounce; to Argos ne'er
May'st thou return! never may Thebes be thine!
Soon may'st thou perish by a brother's hand,
Slaying the slayer! may dark Erebus
Receive them both! and now on you I call
Ye goddesses rever'd, and thou, O! Mars,
Thou, who hast rais'd the bitter strife between
My impious sons, bear witness to my words!
Farewell: now go, and tell the Thebans, tell
Thy faithful friends, how fair an heritage

Your Œdipus hath here bequeath'd his children.

CHORUS.

O! Polynices, little is the joy
Which we can give thee of this fatal journey;
Therefore away and leave us.

POLYNICES.

A sad path
These steps have trod indeed, of woe to me
And to my friends; was it for this, alas!
I came from Argos? I can never tell
My mournful story there, never return;
O! I must bury it in silence all.
My sisters, ye have heard the dreadful curse
Which he pronounc'd; O! if it be fulfill'd,
And some kind hand restore you back to Thebes,
At least remember me; at least perform
The fun'ral rites, and hide me in the tomb;
So shall your names, for pious tenderness
To an unhappy father long rever'd,
With added praises crown'd, exalted shine,
For this kind office to a brother's shade.

ANTIGONE.

O! Polynices, let me beg thee, hear
Thy sister now.

POLYNICES.

My dear Antigone,
What say'st thou?

ANTIGONE.

Lead thy armies back to Argos,
Nor thus destroy thy country and thyself.

O! Polynices, &c. Brunoy observes, that the more we consider this tender scene, between Polynices and his sister, the more natural, charming, and pathetic we shall find it; the fate of every thing that has intrinsic merit, says he, is to strike us but little at first view, to improve on the second, and always to appear the more beautiful, the more we examine it.

POLYNICES.

It cannot be; my forces once dismiss'd
Through fear, what pow'r shall ever reunite them?

ANTIGONE.

But wherefore all this rage? what canst thou hope
Of fame or profit by the fall of Thebes?

POLYNICES.

'Tis base to fly, and, eldest born as I am,
To be the laughter of a younger brother.

ANTIGONE.

Dost thou not dread the oracles pronounc'd
Against you both, death by each other's hand?

POLYNICES.

I know the sentence; but we must go on.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! and who shall dare to follow thee
After this dire prediction?

POLYNICES.

None shall know it.
The prudent gen'ral tells the good alone,
And keeps the threaten'd ill unknown to all.

ANTIGONE.

Art thou determin'd then, and wilt thou go?

POLYNICES.

Do not dissuade me, for the task is mine;
And tho' a father's fatal curse attend me,
Tho' vengeful furies shall await my steps,
Yet I must go: may Jove indulgent smile
On you, my sisters, if when I am dead,
As soon I shall be, to my breathless corpse
You pay due honours! now farewell for ever,
For living ye shall ne'er again behold me.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! my brother!

POLYNICES.

Do not weep for me.

ANTIGONE.

Who wou'd not weep to see thee rushing thus
On certain death?

POLYNICES.

If I must die, I must

ANTIGONE.

Yet be persuaded.

POLYNICES.

Ask me not to do
A deed unworthy of me.

ANTIGONE.

Losing thee,
I shall be most unhappy.

POLYNICES.

To the gods
Alone belong the fate of mortals; some
Are born to happiness, and some to woe:
You may they guard from ev'ry ill, for sure
Ye merit all the good they can bestow.

[*Exit* POLYNICES.

SCENE III.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Fresh sorrows hath this hapless stranger brought
On me and all; but so hath heav'n decreed,
Which nothing doth in vain; whilst time beholds
And orders all, inflicting woe on woe:
But hark, the thunder roars: almighty Jove!

ŒDIPUS.

My daughters, O! my daughters, who will bring

Fresh sorrows, &c. From this place to the arrival of Theseus, the Chorus in the original, being in strophe and antistrophe, was probably set to music and sung; but as it is interrupted by the dialogue, the reasons for not throwing it into ode or rhyme in the translation are sufficiently obvious.

The noble Theseus here, that best of men?

ANTIGONE.

Wherefore, my father, shou'd we call him hither?

ŒDIPUS.

This winged lightning from the arm of Jove
Must bear me to the shades below. Where's Theseus?
Let him be sent for instantly.

CHORUS.

Again,
Another dreadful clap! it strikes my soul
With horror, and my hairs do stand an end
With fear; behold, again the lightnings flash;
I dread the consequence, for not in vain
These signs appear, of some calamity
Portentous ever: O! ethereal Jove!

ŒDIPUS.

Alas! my children, nought can save me now,
The fatal hour of my departure hence
Draws nigh.

ANTIGONE.

Why think'st thou so?

ŒDIPUS.

I know it well.
Send for the king immediately.

CHORUS.

Alas!
The thunder rolls on ev'ry side; good heav'n,
Protect us! if to this devoted land
It bodes destruction, let not ruin fall
On me; O let not that be our reward
For pitying thus a poor deserted stranger:
O! Jove! on thee we call, protect and save us!

ŒDIPUS.

Is Theseus come, shall he once more behold me,
Whilst yet I live, and keep my perfect mind?

CHORUS.

What secret hast thou to reveal to him?

ŒDIPUS.

I owe him much, and wou'd repay his goodness
E'en as I promis'd him.

CHORUS.

O! haste, my son;
At Neptune's altar leave the sacrifice,
And hither fly, for Œdipus to thee
And to thy country grateful waits to pay
Thy bounties; haste, O! Theseus, to receive them.

SCENE IV.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

Again this noise, this wild astonishment,
Amongst you all! was Œdipus the cause?
Or did the bolt of Jove, and rushing hail
Affright you? when the god in raging storms
Descends thus dreadful, we have cause to fear.

ŒDIPUS.

O! king, thou com'st in happy hour, some god
Propitious led thee hither.

THESEUS.

Son of Laius,
What new event hath happen'd?

ŒDIPUS.

Know, my life
At length is verging to its latest hour;
I wish to die, but first my vows to thee,
And to this city, faithful must perform.

THESEUS.

But who hath told thee thou so soon shalt die?

ŒDIPUS.

The gods themselves, who never utter falsehood,

By signs infallible have warn'd me of it.

THESEUS.

How spake they to thee?

ŒDIPUS.

In repeated thunder
And lightning from th' all-powerful hand of Jove.

THESEUS.

I do believe thee, for thy prophecies
Were never false; but say, what must be done?

ŒDIPUS.

O! son of Ægeus, I will tell thee all
The bliss reserved for thee in thy age,
For thee, and for thy country; I must go
To my appointed place, and there shall die:
I go without a guide, nor must thou tell
To mortal ear where Œdipus doth lie,
For ever hid; O! king, that sacred place
Shall be thy sure defence, and better far
Than many a shield, or all the social aid
Of firm alliance in the field of war:
What more remains, unutterable now,
Of higher import, thither when thou com'st
To thee alone shall be deliver'd; nought
Shall I reveal, or to the citizens,
Or e'en to those, beloved as they are,
My pious daughters; thou must ever keep
The solemn secret, only when thy life
Draws near its end, disclose it to thy son,
Heir of thy kingdom, and to him alone:
From king to king thus shall the tale devolve,
And thus thy Athens be for ever safe
From Theban force; even the best of cities,
Where justice rules, may swerve from virtue's laws
And be oppressive, but the gods, tho' late,
Will one day punish all who disobey
Their sacred mandates; therefore, son of Ægeus,
Be careful, and be just; but this to thee

I need not say: quick let us to the place,
For so the gods decree: there must I go,
Thence never to return: come then, my daughters,
Long have you been my pious guides, henceforth
I must be yours; follow, but touch me not;
Let me find out the tomb where I must hide
My poor remains; that way my journey lies;
[*pointing with his hand.*
Away: thou god of shades, great Mercury,
And Proserpine, infernal pow'rs, conduct me!
O! sightless eyes, where are ye? never more
Shall these hands touch your unavailing orbs,
O! light and life, farewell! at length I go
To hide me in the tomb; but O! for thee,
My best beloved friend, and this fair land,
And these thy subjects, may prosperity
Attend you still, and may you sometimes deign
Amidst your bliss to think on Œdipus! [*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

Goddess invisible, on thee we call,
If thee we may invoke, Proserpina, and thee
Great Pluto, king of shades, O grant
That not oppress'd by tort'ring pain
Beneath the stroke of death he linger long,
But swift with easy steps descend,
To Styx's drear abode;
For he hath led a life of toil and pain;
May the just gods repay his undeserved woe!
Ye goddesses rever'd, who dwell
Beneath the earth deep hid, and thou,
Who, barking from thy gloomy cave,

Goddess invisible, &c. This is the fourth song, or intermede of the Chorus, who perceiving that the death of Œdipus is unavoidable, and every moment to be expected, put up their prayers to the infernal powers for his easy and peaceful departure; the original consists, like the other chorusses, of strophe and antistrophe: I have taken the liberty to throw the whole into one irregular ode, of varied measures, without rhyme.

Unconquer'd Cerb'rus, guard'st the ghosts below,
On thee, O! son of Tartarus, we call,
For thou art ever wakeful, lead, O! lead
To thy dark mansions this unhappy stranger.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

O! CITIZENS, I come to tell a tale——
But to be brief, know, Œdipus is dead.
To speak the manner and strange circumstance
Of his departure will require more words,
And calls for your attention.

CHORUS.

Is he gone?
Unhappy man!

MESSENGER.

For ever hath he left
The path of life.

CHORUS.

How died he? by the hand
Of heav'n dismiss'd, without disease or pain?

Œdipus is dead. The length of this description, and the number of circumstances recounted in it, seem to make it highly improbable that so many things could have happened in the short space of time allowed for them, being only from the exit of Œdipus to the entrance of the Messenger. There is no way of excusing Sophocles in this particular, but by supposing that the preceding ode of the Chorus being set to music, might take up a long time in the performance; perhaps the impatience of the spectator to know the catastrophe may plead still more strongly in defence of this precipitation.

MESSENGER.

O! 'twas a scene of wonder; how he left
This place, and self-conducted, led us on,
Blind as he was, ye all remember well.
Soon as he came to where the craggy steep
With brazen steps leads to the hollow gulph,
Where various paths unite, a place renown'd
For the fam'd league of Theseus and his friend,
Between Acherdus and the Thracian rock,
On a sepulchral stone he sat him down;
Pull'd off the filthy weeds he long had worn,
And bade his daughters instantly prepare
The bath and splendid garb; with hasty steps
To Ceres' neighb'ring altar they repair
Obedient, bring the vessel, and the robe
Funereal; all things done, as custom bids
For dying men, sudden a dreadful clap
Of thunder shook the ground; the virgins trembled,
And clinging fearful round their father's knees
Beat their sad breasts, and wept; soon as he heard
The sound portentous, he embrac'd his daughters:
Children, he cried, your father is no more;
No longer shall you lead a life of pain,
No longer toil for Œdipus; alas!
'Twas dreadful to you, but this day, my children,
Shall end your sorrows and my life together:
Never did father love his daughters more
Than I have lov'd, but henceforth you must live
Without your Œdipus; farewell for ever!
He spake, and long in sad embraces join'd,
They wept aloud; at length did clam'rous grief
To silent sorrow yield, and all was still;
When suddenly we heard a voice that oft

O! 'twas a scene of wonder, &c. The celebrated critic Longinus takes notice, in his Treatise on the Sublime, of this narration of Œdipus's death, as a proof of Sophocles's peculiar excellency in the descriptive.

Repeated, 'Œdipus, why this delay?
'Where art thou, Œdipus?' the wretched king,
Attentive to the call of heav'n, desir'd
That Theseus might be sent for; Theseus came;
When thus the dying exile; O! my friend,
Give me thy hand, my daughters give him yours,
Let this, my dearest Theseus, be the pledge
Of amity between you, promise here
That you will ne'er forsake my hapless children,
But henceforth cherish, comfort, and protect them.
The gen'rous king, in pity to their woes,
Vow'd to perform what Œdipus desir'd:
The father threw his feeble arms around
His weeping children; you, he cried, must learn
To bear your suff'rings with an equal mind,
And leave this place; for not to mortal eye
Is giv'n to see my future fate; away;
Theseus alone must stay, and know it all.
This did we hear him utter as we stood
Attentive; when his duteous daughters left him,
And went their way; we wept, and follow'd them;
Soon we return'd, but Œdipus was gone;
The king, alone remaining, as if struck
With terror at some dreadful spectacle,
Had with his hand o'er-veil'd his downcast eye;
A little after we beheld him bend
In humble adoration to the earth,
And then to heav'n prefer his ardent pray'r:
How the poor exile perish'd none can tell
But Theseus; nor the fiery blast of Jove
Destroy'd, nor sea o'erwhelm'd him, but from heav'n
Some messenger divine did snatch him hence,
Or pow'r infernal bade the pitying earth
Open her peaceful bosom to receive him;
Without a groan, disease, or pain he fell:
'Twas wondrous all; to those, who credit not
This strange report, I answer, 'tis most true.

CHORUS.

Where are his daughters, with their weeping friends
Who follow'd them?

MESSENGER.

They cannot be far off;
The voice of grief I hear proclaims them nigh.

SCENE II.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, WITH ATTENDANTS, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

Alas! the time is come when we must weep
Our father's fate, the fate of all his race
Long since unhappy; various were the toils,
The labours we endur'd, but this is far,
Far above all, unutterable woe.

CHORUS.

What is it?

ANTIGONE.

O! it cannot be conceiv'd.

CHORUS.

Is he then dead?

ANTIGONE.

He is: his death was strange
And wonderful; for not in war he fell,
Nor did the sea o'erwhelm him, but the earth
Hath hid him from us; deadly night hath clos'd
Our eyes in sadness; whether o'er the seas
We roam, or exiles in a foreign land
Lead our sad days, we must be still unhappy:
Alas! I only wish I might have died
With my poor father; wherefore shou'd I ask
For longer life?

CHORUS.

Ye good and pious daughters,

Remember, what the will of heav'n decrees
With patience we must bear; indulge not then
Excess of grief; your fate hath not deserv'd it.

ANTIGONE.

O! I was fond of misery with him;
E'en what was most unlovely grew belov'd,
When he was with me. O! my dearest father,
Beneath the earth now in deep darkness hid,
Worn as thou wert with age, to me thou still
Wert dear, and shalt be ever.

CHORUS.

Now his course
Is finish'd.

ANTIGONE.

Even as he wish'd he died
In a strange land, for such was his desire;
A shady turf cover'd his lifeless limbs;
Nor unlamented fell; for O! these eyes,
My father, still shall weep for thee, nor time
Ere blot thee from my memory.

ISMENE.

Alas!
Alas! my sister, what must be our fate,
Forlorn and helpless, of our father thus
Bereft?

CHORUS.

His end was happy, therefore cease
Your fruitless tears: from sorrow none is free.

ANTIGONE.

Let us be gone.

ISMENE.

But where?

ANTIGONE.

I wish ——

ISMENE.

O! what?

ANTIGONE.

To see the tomb.

ISMENE.

Whose tomb?

ANTIGONE.

Our father's: oh!

ISMENE.

But is it lawful? know'st thou that?

ANTIGONE.

Why thus
Reprove me, my Ismene?

ISMENE.

He is yet
Unburied, and without ——

ANTIGONE.

O! lead me there,
Then kill me if thou wilt; for where, alas!
Can I betake me?

CHORUS.

Friends, be comforted.

ANTIGONE.

Where shall I fly?

CHORUS.

Thou hast already 'scap'd
Unnumber'd ills.

ANTIGONE.

I'm thinking, my Ismene ——

ISMENE.

What think'st thou?

ANTIGONE.

How we shall get home.

CHORUS.

No more;
Thou hast been long familiar with affliction.

ANTIGONE.

My life hath ever been a life of pain
And sorrow, but this far exceeds them all.

CHORUS.

The storm beats hard upon you.

ANTIGONE.

O! it doth.

CHORUS.

I know it must.

ANTIGONE.

O! whither shall we fly?
Great Jove! what hope remains?

CHORUS.

Suppress your griefs;
We shou'd not weep for those who wish'd to die,
And meet their fate with pleasure; 'tis not just
Nor lawful to lament them.

SCENE III.

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

Son of Ægeus,
Suppliant to thee we come.

THESEUS.

What wou'd ye of me?

ANTIGONE.

Permit us but to see our father's tomb.

THESEUS.

It is not lawful.

ANTIGONE.

O! what say'st thou, king?

THESEUS.

Know, pious virgins, Œdipus himself
Forbade that any shou'd approach his tomb;
That sacred spot, which he possesses there,
No mortal must profane: to me, he said,
If careful I perform'd his last command,
Shou'd joy and safety come, with victory

And peace to Athens; this your gods did hear,
Confirmed by the sacred oath of Jove.

ANTIGONE.

If such our father's will, we must submit;
But, O! permit us to revisit Thebes,
That so we may prevent th' impending fate
Of our dear brothers.

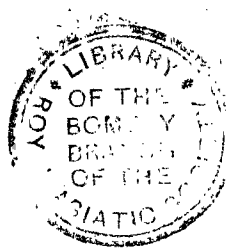
THESEUS.

All that you request,
Or may be grateful to that honour'd shade,
Whose mem'ry we revere, I freely grant;
For I must not be weary of my task.

CHORUS.

Remember, virgins, to repress your sorrows,
And cease your fruitless grief; for know, 'tis all
Decreed by fate, and all the work of heav'n.

THE END.



E. Blackader, Printer, Tooks Court, Chancery Lane, London.

00081571

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018